# THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL

# THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL

*SOME BORZOI BOOKS*

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ATTITUDE
GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE
PRINCE D. S. MIRSKY

CONTEMPORARY SPANISH LITERATURE
AUBREY F. G. BELL

THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL
ABEL CHEVALLEY

THE LONDON PERAMBULATOR
JAMES BONE

STILL MORE PREJUDICE
A. B. WALKELY

OLD LAMPS FOR NEW
CLAUDE BRAGDON

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
LLEWELLYN JONES

OTHER PROVINCES
CARL VAN DOREN

# THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

ABEL CHEVALLEY

BY BEN RAY REDMAN

NEW YORK

ALFRED · A · KNOPF

1925

COPYRIGHT, 1925, BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD ix

## CHAPTER I

THE ENGLISH NOVEL BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY 1

i. Defoe and His Predecessors 1
ii. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett 12
iii. The End of the Eighteenth Century (Laurence Sterne, Dr. Johnson, Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen) 18

## CHAPTER II

THE ENGLISH NOVEL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY 25

i. The New Century 25
ii. Dickens, Thackeray, and Their Contemporaries (Anthony Trollope, Charles Reade, Bulwer Lytton) 30
iii. Victorian Women Novelists (The Brontës, George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward) 38
iv. George Meredith and Thomas Hardy 57

## CHAPTER III

THE VICTORIAN AGE AND THE AGE OF EDWARD VII 72

i. A Period of Transition 72
ii. The *fin de siècle* Novelists (Oscar Wilde, George Moore, Hubert Crackanthorpe) 77
iii. George Gissing 84

CHAPTER IV

Samuel Butler and His Influence 90

CHAPTER V

Henry James and the Psychological Novel 109

CHAPTER VI

Development of the English Novel During the Past Thirty Years 117

i. New Tendencies 117

ii. Novels of History and Adventure from Stevenson to Maurice Hewlett 119

iii. Precursors of the Contemporary Novel (W. J. Locke, Robert Hichens, E. M. Forster, G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, E. F. Benson, Richard Pryce, Jerome K. Jerome, W. W. Jacobs, and Others) 129

CHAPTER VII

The Regionalists 135

i. Scotland (Sir J. M. Barrie, the "Kailyard School," etc.) 135

ii. Ireland (James Stephens, St. John Ervine, James Joyce, and Others) 139

iii. Dartmoor and Cornwall (Eden Phillpotts, James Trevena, etc.) 143

iv. London (the "Cockney School," etc.) 145

CHAPTER VIII

The Five Great Contemporary Novelists 149

i. Rudyard Kipling 149

ii. H. G. Wells 156

iii. Arnold Bennett 166

iv. John Galsworthy 175

v. Joseph Conrad 180

## CHAPTER IX

The Women Novelists from George Eliot to the War 190
i. The Popular Women Novelists ("Sarah Grand," "J. O. Hobbes," "Lucas Malet," Mrs. W. K. Clifford, Elizabeth Robins, Mrs. Dudeney, etc.) 190
ii. Miss May Sinclair 198

## CHAPTER X

The Younger Generation 208
i. Still Another Evolution 208
ii. Hugh Walpole 219
iii. Oliver Onions 222
iv. Compton Mackenzie 225
v. J. D. Beresford 228
vi. D. H. Lawrence 236
vii. Frank Swinnerton 238

## CHAPTER XI

The English Novel since the War 243

Conclusion 252

Index

# FOREWORD

This book was originally written in French, for French students, with no concealment of the fact that much of its matter was second-hand. I said that the book was partly a summary of English opinion of English novelists, an abstract, a kind of class-book. I also likened it to a guide-book for French explorers in the realm of English fiction.

But it occurred to some English publishers and critics that I had in fact done more and better than I professed to have done. They pointed out not only that the compiled matter in this little book had been condensed, rearranged, re-expressed, and made mine, but that it had also been fertilized by new ideas, mobilized by a fresh movement, given a new lucidity, and interspersed with some personal views. They found, in addition, enough original matter in this self-styled "patchwork manual" to make it equal, in formative and informative value, to any work of the same kind on the same subject.

It is not for me to say whether they were mistaken. Be this as it may, the book was simultaneously published by the Oxford University Press in England and by *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in France. It was on the strength of its original, not of its borrowed elements that it was appraised—and approved.

However, I cannot let a translation be published in America without repeating what I wrote in my Preface

to the French edition: "In many respects this book is nothing more than an abridgment of other books. . . ." Into the first eighty pages I have condensed a whole library of criticism, and added a little. The second third deals with the period between 1890 and 1914, and there Mr. Harold Williams, and in a lesser degree Professor Cunliffe, were in some parts closely followed, quoted, and sometimes paraphrased with acknowledgment. The third part, contemporary, is as completely original as such work can be.

ABEL CHEVALLEY.

*1924.*

# THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL

## CHAPTER I

## THE ENGLISH NOVEL BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### I

### *Defoe and His Predecessors*

It is difficult to define the novel, and especially the English novel, because of its extreme plasticity. Only in mathematics can a given object be circumscribed with precision: whatever is not amenable to mathematical laws escapes scientific definition; and this is particularly true of that subjective image of the world of which literature, in its divers forms, is only an essayed transcription. Yet, when one does approach a subject that is rebellious to algebraic notation, one must resolve to distinguish or describe it at least, even if one cannot define it. While completely repudiating the hope of arriving at an exact knowledge of the proposed matter, it is still necessary to apprehend it. If, within these limits, one dared attempt a definition of the novel, one could, perhaps, do no better than to say that it is a prose fiction of a certain length.

The English, it is true, have two words whereby they designate fiction in prose. The one—"romance"—is applied to books in which imagination predominates over observation. The other—"novel"—designates the more recent genre which has for its domain the life of every

day and of all men. But what lack of precision there is in this verbal separation! Besides, it is not enough to divide in order to understand. Two uncertain varieties do not establish the certainty of a single species.

When one says that the novel is a prose fiction of a certain length, one partially fails, perhaps, to fulfil the two requirements of a good definition: that it shall apply to the whole object, and that it shall include nothing but the object. The suggested definition would, for example, admit as novels certain works of edification, of polemics, even of instruction and downright propaganda—which seem to increase in number as the genre grows older—since these works are in prose, fictitious, and generally prolix. On the other hand, the definition would exclude—since they are in verse—a host of poetical narratives from *Troilus and Cressida* to *Marmion* and *Evangeline*, which, save for rhyme or rhythm, display all the attributes of the novel genre.

Indeed, it must be recognized that our definition is not entirely satisfactory: too narrow to include the whole object, it is also too broad to apply to nothing but the object. But the truth is that nothing is definable which is indefinite by nature. Now novels and novelists, men and their works, exist; but *the novel* has no existence other than that of a metaphor, and in consequence it shares in the arbitrary nature of all abstractions. In the beginning there was chaos, and all would remain chaos were it not for this arbitrary authority which presides at the classification of ideas.

It is true, to return to examples already cited, that the novel in verse is as plausible as the novel in prose. But if we enlarge our definition to embrace poetic works, why should we not also admit the drama, which would be a

novel in dialogue; the epopee, which would be an epic novel; and history, a veracious novel, or nearly so? Instead of the novel remaining one of the forms of literature, literature would then become the totality of the novel's forms. And I have no objection providing we understand each other; it is precisely for the sake of understanding that classifications are made. But they fatally involve a choice somewhere, a division in a subject-matter that is really homogeneous.

At the same time, if one ventured to contract the novel to the exact measure of reality—in order to exclude from the genre those fictions which are pure allegory, means of exhortation, or utterly improbable adventures—a throng of works and masterpieces would then disappear from the category, despite custom and universal agreement, which, after all, are the sole arbiters of such matters. For example, one would have to strike from the list *Télémaque* and *Gulliver*, all the Utopias, and the innumerable host of books with a thesis which are an outstanding part of fiction in England. If one insisted on the analysis of characters and sentiments, it would be to proscribe *Robinson Crusoe*. If one demanded plot, action, narrative, and events, it would be to shut out the psychological novelists, such as Meredith and James.

But there is no reason to be disturbed by the imperfection and insufficiency of any *a priori* conception of the novel. Any classification is useful, provided it is clear and plausible: it is misleading and dangerous only when our minds substitute it for reality, when it becomes an object rather than an instrument of research.

For the moment let us be content to say that the English novel is a prose fiction of a certain length. Our definition is broad, indeed, and in some respects it is too

narrow. But it is clear, and one must stop somewhere. Besides, all research takes its departure from an abstract definition which circumscribes it, in order to arrive at another definition, more rigorous and more concrete, which concludes it. The evidence of facts along the road takes care of necessary adaptations.

Prose fiction dates from well before the eighteenth century, but the English novel goes back no further than that century. Before Defoe, all writing comprised under this name seems to have been imported from abroad. It was not until after Defoe, when Richardson and Fielding had published their books, that England, having patented her goods—if one may so express it—began to export and to conquer; and in her turn distributed over the world the new literary type that she had developed. During the Middle Ages the Normans had brought their chivalric histories and tales with them from France to England. The epic narratives, conveyed from France or preserved by the Celts of the two Brittanies, suffered a better fate than mere reproduction. One of the first books printed in England was Malory's *A Book of the Noble Historyes of King Arthur and of Certen of his Knyghtes*, which came from Caxton's press in 1495, and which was continually reprinted down to the seventeenth century. The tales did not enjoy the same good fortune. It was with a Utopia—that is to say, a social satire—that the English novel made its debut in the sixteenth century. Thomas More wrote in Latin. About the same time Rabelais was writing in French another universal satire, another Utopia, infinitely more vigorous, more comprehensive, and more human. There can be no question of likening, or even of comparing, to each other two books which have no common standard. But there is more than

coincidence in this simultaneous annunciation of the novel, in France as in England, by a Utopia. The revolt of the mind against its own epoch is never for a moment absent from the history of fiction. It precedes or accompanies all the awakenings of genre, and announces them by reverberating works. More in the sixteenth century, Bacon in the seventeenth, Swift in the eighteenth, Godwin in the nineteenth, and Wells in the twentieth century, are all the precursors of a renovation of fiction. The chain of Voyages to a better world is unbroken, save by the trip to the Moon. Even in the seventeenth century, *Oceanas* were following *Atlantises*. But the obscure, rusty links of the chain are periodically interspersed with gleaming points of bright new steel. There has been no great transformation of the novel that has not translated a revolution of manners and ideas; no revolution of manners or ideas without a Utopia to announce or to express it. The novel, and especially the English novel, is one of the favourite means by which the race, the nation, the age, achieve self-consciousness. Consciousness is dulled by continuity, by tradition: it is awakened by contrast, and finds realization in revolt. Fiction, like all life, far from being essentially traditional, is change; it is perpetuated by opposition, and it finds new life in explosions of revolt no less than in phases of obedience. Fidelity to tradition is no more normal than infidelity is accidental. Revolution is not opposed to evolution: it is one of its processes.

We shall come upon this idea again in the novelists of the twentieth century. But, at the very beginning, it is well to note that if the contemporary period of the English novel—one of its richest and greatest periods—is characterized by an unreasoning mutiny against recent disciplines, and by a disposition to conscious, pre-

meditated acts of violence against the immediately anterior order, there is in this no sign of accident, nor any symptom of disease, but simply the stamp of life itself. Tradition, even in the English novel, is not convention, but its opposite.

The Elizabethan Age witnessed a rich and sudden flowering of prose fiction. In this, as in all fields of activity, the age evinced incredible restlessness and exuberance. The abundance and the variety of this production might lead one to believe that here was the beginning of the English novel. It was nothing of the sort. The works produced at the close of the sixteenth century manifestly proceeded from imitation of foreign models, not from an immediate, national observation. Their form is supremely artificial: it is Spanish Gongorism, compacted of similitudes and antitheses, metaphors and alliterations—in fine, the sublimity of the precious. Subjects and characters are chosen from exceptional *milieux* (courts and brigands) when they do not spring exclusively from fantasy. In 1579 and 1580 appeared Lyly's *Euphues*, in which amphigorism of the Spanish mode triumphs and parades itself in English dress. It is a pedagogic romance in which dissertations on love alternate with discourses on education. Like so many other writers of the sixteenth century (Rabelais and Montaigne in France, Roger Ascham in England), the author had for subject and object the formation of the ideal man.

During the decade between 1585 and 1595, Greene and Lodge deluged England with productions of the same genre and style. In 1590 Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*—written ten years earlier—was published. It is a vast chivalric romance rather than a pastoral, containing

material enough for a whole cycle. The adventures of Musidorus, prince of Thessaly, and of Pyrocles, prince of Macedon, who seek the love of Pamela and Philoclea, daughters of King Basilius of Arcadia, are unfolded among the heroes of no country and no age that Jacopo Sannazaro had made known two generations before in his *Arcadia* (1504). One would have to have made a special study of the romances of the same genre that were published during the next forty or fifty years to dare to say that foreign inspiration is everywhere flagrant and the atmosphere universally artificial. However, we are not concerned here with appreciation, but with the establishment of certain facts. In some of Greene's works one finds a sincere autobiographical element, and for a moment one sees rising from the lower depths the creature of misery and misfortune that Defoe was later to resuscitate. But, all in all, one may say that the heroic and pastoral romance, in what was perhaps the most brilliant period of literature, was the image not of English life, but of its culture, its aspirations, and its sentiments.

Parallelly, simultaneously, there developed in England the picaresque tale that had come out of Spain. The incessant wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the common distribution of fire-arms, had made the highways swarm with adventurers, lords and beggars who led chequered lives. The ingenious rogue had already furnished food for fiction. But Renart is allegorical, Ulenspiegel a clumsy clown, Panurge a philosopher. The picaroon of Lazarillo de Tormes and of Guzman d'Alfarache, a realer and more active type, was enticing and swarming.

Every period of great stress into which man is flung, stirred up, and pulverized on the roads of the universe,

leaves behind it a moving scum. Picaresque types have already appeared in our war and post-war literature; and they will multiply before many years have passed. Jack Wilton, the hero of *The Unfortunate Traveller*, whom Thomas Nash presented to the English public in 1594, is the progenitor of an immense family of criminals and adventurers that has been perpetuated by Bunyan, Defoe, Fielding, Smollett, and Thackeray down to the present time. It was through these characters that the Elizabethan novel anticipated the modern novel. It would be interesting to explore the origin of this line, and to discover in it the beginnings of realism. Let us cite, at least, Deloney's *Thomas of Reading*, 1596, in which the author, a London silk-weaver, depicted the workingman's life in London and described scenes of crime which heralded the novel "thriller."

Through the whole first half of the seventeenth century, one traces these two veins in prose fiction: the one, heroic, pastoral, amorous; the other, lively and rascally. Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621), Bayle's *Parthenissa* (1664), and Mackenzie's *Aretina* (1661)—to cite only two or three names from this fertile and misunderstood epoch—are at once reminiscent of Sidney's *Arcadia* and the contemporary works of La Calprenède and Mlle. de Scudéry. On the other hand, the rogues and brigands, often painted for or by themselves (even in the four volumes of *The English Rogue*, by Richard Head and Francis Kirkman, 1665–1680), had, from the time of Elizabeth, acquired the edifying habit of confession and repentance. In the following generation they were enrolled in the service of religion, which simultaneously annexed the heroes of the chivalric romances, decked them

out in allegory, and sent forth this motley company to the conquest of Paradise. In such fashion did militant Puritanism give birth to a series of forgotten works, among which Nathaniel Ingelo's *Bentivolio*, 1660, clearly foreshadowed the power of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678 and 1684. Thenceforward English fiction scarcely ever abandoned its preoccupation with morality, even when, with Mrs. Behn (*Oronoko*, 1688), the novel invaded the tropics and took savages and exoticism to its breast. In considering the seventeenth century, it is also necessary to note the continuous reaction against the absurdities of heroic fiction, the secret progress of observation—even in allegory—and the appearance of the dramatic art in composition.[1]

Picaresque adventure, Puritan sentiment, exoticism, perpetual change of scene, precision in detail, disdain of the heroic—all these elements will be found again in Defoe. It would be especially pertinent to follow the multiplication of "character" books, and then the development of the "essay" in reviews and pamphlets, in order to understand the elaboration of that quasi-photographic analysis of people and *milieux* which has distinguished the English novel from its inception. The letters of *Pamela* proceed no less surely from the *Tatler* than does the masterpiece *Tom Jones* from the *Spectator* essays.

So, toward the end of the seventeenth century, the elements of a new genre were gathering. The novel until then had been a thing of fashion and imitation, devoted to exceptional subjects, and destined for a narrow circle. Scarcely three generations of men had yet lived since the invention of printing. But it was not in vain that Reform and Revolution had multiplied readers and created

[1] Congreve's novel, *Incognita*, for example.

even in the general public a daily need of reading-matter. Newspapers were appearing for the first time, permitting the satisfaction of this desire. The public of Defoe was born. This very great writer, long unappreciated, breathed life into the heart of fiction.

Daniel Defoe would be inexplicable if one saw in him only the author of *Robinson Crusoe*. He was a giant of letters, a phenomenon of fertility, beside whom Balzac himself appears a child. We have two hundred and fifty works from his pen, and some other hundreds that are attributed to him. Novels form only a portion of his books, and a secondary portion in his eyes. He did not commence to write them until he was sixty years old. Before that he had turned his hand to all trades, those of letters and others: he had been soldier, hosier, tile-maker, and printer; but, above all and continually, he had been a pamphleteer, a hack journalist. That was his vocation. By the ton he had turned out polemics, popular treatises, and articles in which he employed all means of persuasion, licit and illicit: factitious letters, apocryphal narratives, imaginary catastrophes, forged balance-sheets, fictitious testimony, false confessions, and invented characters. All this he presented with such a wealth of details, particulars, and circumstances that fiction appeared as verisimilar as reality. It was after forty years spent in mystifying the public that he sat down to write novels. One guesses what he brought to the task. All his writings had been calculated irresistibly to demonstrate something. Then came a day when, prompted by a desire for relaxation, by interest or by instinct, he wrote stories which proved nothing at all; but as a result of dexterity, practice, and genius they were no less exact and circumstantial

than their predecessors, and they carried conviction without seeming to lay claim to it.

So it was that in the midst of a thousand other tasks an astonishing series of fictions was produced: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Mr. Duncan Campbell, The Life of Captain Singleton* (1720), *Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack* (1722), *Roxana* (1724), *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720), *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Immediate posterity seized upon *Robinson Crusoe* and made it a second Bible of mankind. We discover other testaments in Defoe's work: that of opprobrium and misery, for example, in *Moll Flanders.* Then Defoe returns to his business, his ideas, and his schemes, and dies, compiling, caviling, inventing; always precise as fact, indifferent as nature, rapid as action, alive as life.

What matters it whether he did or did not know his predecessors? He had no need of heroics and pastorals, braggarts and swashbucklers. He invented the picaresque yarn as much as he continued it. His characters are low folk: sailors, prostitutes, cut-purses. But he knew them. And mankind is close to them. Public and publishers demanded them; and Defoe was the servant of his patrons and his clients. It was in the service of reality, of necessity, that he came upon an immortal art, perhaps without realizing it. He exonerates in advance all those inspired hacks who discover their genius in their tasks.

With the almost indifferent ease of the specialist, without effort or noise, with an even and powerful and rapid abundance, he derived his novelist's manner from his practice as a pamphleteer. In a single lifetime he described the century-long curve whereby art issues from life. Myriads of potters preceded the ceramic art. The novel

of Defoe came from the journal as the vase from the jar. Others were destined to make of it an urn. He was not the Messiah of the English novel, but its prophet. With a magnificent simplicity of vision and of method which assured him—as it assures the great classics—the eternal attention of children, he returned by necessity to the very source of fiction. He strengthened it by practice, discovered its essence, and announced its incarnations. If the *story-teller's* art consists primarily in *story-telling*, in carrying conviction, in creating the illusion of reality, then Defoe must take precedence of Richardson and Fielding. He did not put into the novel all that they were to bring to it— analysis, emotion, and humour—but, on the other hand, they put into it nothing superior to what he brought to it, for his contribution was the very essence: action, verisimilitude, and life.

## II

### *Richardson, Fielding, Smollett*

When the novel, still in swaddling-clothes, was making its advent with Defoe, poetry had already put forth unsurpassable masterpieces: the drama of Shakespeare, and the epic of Milton. The pamphlet and the journal, with a century's growth behind them; satire in prose and verse; theology and philosophy, the heirs of many generations, were all displaying an adult power. Fiction, however, had as yet found neither its organ nor its public. Segregated at the top and the bottom of the social ladder, it seemed to have no other subjects than love and crime, no other characters than princes and knaves. However, the time was coming when the merchant and middle

classes, neither rascals nor people of fashion, would wish in turn to see their own image in a mirror of manners. Educated by journals, stirred by politics and religion, profoundly moved by Methodism, at once prosaic and sentimental, with no taste for pure reason and distrustful of pure imagination, but athirst for emotion and sympathy, the middle classes of the eighteenth century were awaiting their interpreter. It was of them and for them that the English novel was born: Richardson, Fielding and Smollett are their prolocutors.

In a flash, within fifteen years, fifteen short years—from 1739 to 1754—the British novel suddenly appeared, not only established but supreme in influence, sprung to life full-armed, itself the creator of a European movement which found final expression in Rousseau.

This movement was accomplished in two periods of five years each, which were separated by an interval of equal duration. The first group, from 1739 to 1744: *Pamela* by Richardson; *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild* by Fielding; *David Simple* by Sarah Fielding. Then a five-year pause. The second group, from 1749 to 1754: *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* by Richardson; *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* by Fielding; *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* by Smollett.

Another pause of five years. Then a scattering of belated or succedaneous works down to *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Goldsmith (1765), Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767), and *Humphrey Clinker* by Smollett (1771).

The novel of sensation and horror was born as early as 1764, and this, in company with the fiction of terror and doctrine, was destined to hold the centre of the stage down to the nineteenth century.

Despite Victorian criticism, which was shocked by the amorality of Defoe, it is obvious that the author of *Moll Flanders* was one of the creators of the English novel by the same title as Richardson and Fielding. But his isolated, independent contribution preceded by twenty years the simultaneous flowering in which the other great English novelists of the eighteenth century concurred. Even if we include Defoe's work in the period required for the creation of the English novel, this period still extends over only forty years, a mere instant when compared with the time required for the development of other literary genres: drama, poetry, etc.

Now we have long been familiar with specimens of extinct species: the world is full of fossils, and so is literature. We are familiar, too, with certain species which, thanks to circumstance, are resuscitated after a quasi-extinction. But this explosion of vital force, this sudden leap of the organism towards a new form, this exceedingly rapid and apparently spontaneous appearance of a new genre, make us think of recent discoveries which have been calculated to show even in living creatures certain phenomena which are comparable to revolutions in society. There is no need of indulging in ridiculous metaphors, or of taking a literary species for an animal species; but, by virtue of similarity, one may say that the British novel, during its brief history, has comported itself like those plants whose peculiar aptitude for sudden and complete variation has been demonstrated by the botanist de Vries. Here is one of the best examples in literature of that transformation by explosion which succeeds, without excluding, long evolutive periods. Indeed, it seems that the British novel, in the course of its short and active history, has taken at least three of these revo-

lutionary leaps, of which the latest, at the beginning of the twentieth century, is perhaps not the least curious.

The picaresque romance had undoubtedly popularized the atmosphere of brigandage and adventure in which the English novel began to disport itself anew with Defoe and Smollett. In the period which immediately preceded its blossoming, Sorel's *Francion*, and more especially Furetière's *Roman bourgeois*, had paved the way for a British reaction against the shepherds' tales and chivalric narratives over which the age of the Restoration, despite its essentially prosaic character, was still lingering. After Defoe, Fielding may have been inspired to imitate Lesage, Richardson to imitate Marivaux. But no less immense because of that is the abyss between the novel as it was taken up at the beginning of that brief and great period of the eighteenth century and the novel as it was put down at the end of it. A single name ill fits the two varieties.

A fat little printer, overflowing with verbal felicity, indifferent to action, stuffed with superficial sentiment and morality, very feminine and very practical, affectionate and insinuating, sat down one day to compose an epistolary guide for the use of house-wives and kitchen maids. The story of a seduced maid-servant offered itself to him as a theme. His narrative began at random and ended anywhere; but the author threw into it a lifetime's accumulation of internal and external observations of the common people. Clothing, furniture, diet, care of babies, management of servants—all these were flung into it *pêle-mêle*, mixed with the snobbery of his class and of his country, the facile emotion of agitated sex, the clash of selfish motives, and the concert of sentimentalities under cover of conventional morality. Such is the story of

Pamela; but such, too, despite differences of object and *milieu*, are those of Clarissa and of Grandison. In these interminable monographs there is never any mystery, never any gaiety, and little grace or real human sympathy. But never before had the interplay of impulses and motives been similarly studied. Characters and pathos found themselves definitively introduced into fiction.

More nearly complete, perhaps, and more human, Fielding brought to the novel the additional element of human sympathy, and that gift of humour which is nothing else than the sense of life. He was less concerned with morality and sentiment. But he knew how to write and he knew how to laugh. He presented the heights and depths of humanity: his *Tom Jones* is a résumé of English life and manners in the eighteenth century. He exposes the faults of our nature with the same generosity and sincerity that he accords our noble qualities. With him the sun of life as a whole began to illumine the novel. Like Defoe, he had explored the slums of literature and of society. Like Defoe, he was a slave to "copy." But he had also frequented the coffee houses and the company of wits. He had drunk well, eaten well, laughed well, run through several fortunes, written comedies, and pleaded as a lawyer at the bar. He wrote his first novel, *Joseph Andrews*, with the intention of parodying the moralizing sentimentality exuded by *Pamela*. But the truth of nature supplanted intended caricature; and the author ended by adding a still broader truth to the one Richardson had conceived. He created a whole world of characters, and in this world he ran almost the entire gamut of sensations and sentiments. With Fielding the English novel

marched straight into immortality through the door of universality.

For the task of finally localizing and, if one may so express it, "Britainizing" fiction, Fielding perhaps lacked that curt and vigorous ruggedness, childlike in its simplicity and readily caricatured, which is developed by the summary life of the adventurer and the sailor.

Smollett, a surgeon's mate on board a man-of-war, then a colonial doctor, and to the end of his life an indefatigable and necessitous man of the pen, was destined to recapture from Defoe, Lesage, and the picaresque romance the virtue of action, clarity of contours, preeminence of narrative, and simplicity of vision. These essential attributes of fiction had run some risk of disappearing in analysis and sentiment. Still later, Goldsmith amended the pathetic in fiction by a courteous and latent irony and pathos. And Sterne, by his sentimental impressionism and by his imprecision—also to be found in nature—softened what had been perhaps too fixed in his predecessors. It was by this graduated decline that the novel of observation and of middle-class life languished and was effaced before the romantic awakening.

Before this period there had been stories without characters (and sometimes without emotion), as in Defoe, or characters without narrative and without emotion, as in the remarkable psychological sketches of Addison and Steele. Before there had been fractions of the English novel, scattered or successive attributes of the species.

After this period the novel was born, with all its organs. It was destined to make new leaps, to develop by the same sudden, epidemic, irresistible process: but it existed. Its essence was formed by the combination of ac-

tion, analysis and sentiment. And thenceforward the novel, had, indeed, narrative, character and emotion. Examples and models were created, which affirmed the predominance, sometimes of one, sometimes of another of these three elements. But they are there, all simultaneously; sometimes in the same man, as in Fielding for example. They are there, just as action, intelligence and sensibility are present in the human soul.

Other writers were to contribute the surrounding elements, the relations with the external world, the group, the race, collective life, and the mystery of the inexpressible. The novel was destined to develop like a plant, by exchanges with the atmosphere. From this it was to receive dust and pollution, and it was to poison or purify it according to circumstances. It was destined to extend its domain over all the domains of the universe, and over the universe itself. But thenceforward it existed: it was enfranchised on equal terms with the highest literary creations of all countries and all times.

## III

### *The End of the Eighteenth Century*

At the end of the eighteenth century the English novel at once divided and broadened out, as a river does when it reaches a plain.

On the one hand, it extended its domain. In this activity Sterne had been the initiator, the liberator. There had been danger of the novel remaining a social rather than a human mirror. Sterne loosened its structure, but in so doing he enlarged its framework. *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy* is nothing but a picture of

its author's sentiments and humours. Narrative of manners or adventure, depiction of passions, character analysis, story, plot—all these are relegated to a secondary plane. On the first plane disport the caprices and imprecisions, the tastes and proclivities of Laurence Sterne, even those aspects of his soul which are most fugitive, most difficult of seizure, and most rebellious to analysis—to wit: nuances of mood, and unconscious activities of sensibility. After this the novel can serve, and indeed does serve, all purposes. It is Montaigne's *Essay* put in narrative form.

Indeed, certain authors of this period, following the most precise measure and the vastest proportions of their age, draped the eternal mantle of fiction over their ideas, their opinions, and their schemes. Johnson, in *Rasselas*, shaped the novel into an instrument of philosophy; Mackenzie the pupil of Sterne, manœuvred within this form the whole play of impressionism. Johnstone—*The History of a Guinea*—turned it to the purposes of economic and social satire. Hannah More made it a medium for instruction in morality and the proprieties. In the hands of Godwin and the doctrinaires, Holcroft and Bage, it became a tool of politics and an implement of revolution. This same school, later applying itself to a more complex régime, was to create the social novel which has continued to exist until the present day. Miss Edgeworth described Irish life with a verisimilitude and a fidelity that her moralizing pretensions sometimes succeeded in rendering wearisome. Later, Lady Morgan imitated Miss Edgeworth. Susan Ferrier and Mrs. Brunton did for Scotland what Miss Edgeworth had done for Ireland, with the addition of that archaic colour for which Miss Porter had found the formula, and which was to be pat-

ented and successfully established by Walter Scott. Thereafter, no year nor any region was to be without its local novels.

Parallelly and simultaneously imaginations which were weary of present realities, and of the exact rationalism which presided at the renaissance of the English novel, turned avidly toward the past—which was then called "Gothic"—at once in search of the mysterious, the supernatural, the exotic, the terrible, and the archaic. This new thrill was announced by Walpole in his *Castle of Otranto* (1764), and by William Beckford in *Vathek*. Mrs. Radcliffe popularized and amplified the genre in her series of goose-flesh tales, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Lewis and Maturin peopled their lengthy feuilletons with phantoms and with miracles.

Thus, drawn far from the present and beyond the real, shut off from introspective analysis, the generation that witnessed the beginning of the nineteenth century was ripe for the romantic novel which had the past for its setting and the extraordinary for its subject. The stage was set for Walter Scott.

However, under this flood of imagination, the current of observation and analysis created by the eighteenth century was still flowing on, to find an outlet, by way of Fanny Burney's [1] domestic fiction, in the novels of Jane Austen. If these notes were concerned with genius rather than influence, with the value of a novelist rather than with the development of the novel, Jane Austen would perhaps claim more of our time than any of her predecessors or successors. It is not certain that any other writer of

[1] I must be pardoned for only mentioning Fanny Burney; but sacrifices are necessary.

fiction has been more admirably a creator. But her creation, because it was in miniature, and her work, because it occupied small space and little time, were incapable of turning into their own course the English novel which Walter Scott was then leading along other paths. Jane Austen belongs to that race of writers whose contribution to their generation is discovered by posterity. She won success and admiration, but not an immediate following. Her art was not in tune with her time. She wrote in the margin. Later, Meredith and, in part, Thomas Hardy were to suffer a similar fate.

Born in 1775, Jane Austen had finished her best novel, *Pride and Prejudice,* at the age of twenty-two. This young girl, almost a child, had never left her natal parsonage; she had known no other *milieu* than her family, no other experiences than a village life. The fact is characteristic. She never had a single adventure; she felt no apparent need of emotions; she never married, never left her family in the most unexciting of counties; and she died at the age of forty-two. Her first three novels—*Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey* —were written before she was twenty-six years old. She did not publish them until she was between thirty-four and thirty-nine. The last three—*Mansfield Park, Emma, Persuasion*—belong to the same period and display no sensible change in her manner. This small body of work is in every respect similar to its author. Events play no part in it: the sole adventure is an elopement. The whole interest lies in the depiction and in the relations of characters. But there Jane Austen is unique. It matters little that her universe is limited. The moral world is comprised in a village, in a family. The fidelity of portraits is independent of their size. Jane Austen founded

domestic realism. Never before or since has everyday life, set in a small frame, been reproduced so minutely, so diversely and so vigorously; never, in fine, has there been a more successful evocation of the life of all time and of all men—the life that unfolds within us, not around us; within our being, not upon the surface.

It was in a quite opposite direction that Walter Scott was leading the English novel during this same period. In speaking of Jane Austen, he confessed: " . . . the exquisite touch which renders commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me."

What, actually, was Walter Scott? A frustrated poet: a great epic, narrative, descriptive, evocative poet who, disappointed and surpassed in poetry, took his revenge in prose. He ennobled the novel by bringing to it the lustre of genres previously called noble.

Our generation forgets Walter Scott. His work seems to us a museum exhibit. But in this conservative there was a rebel, as there is at the bottom of every romanticist. In his youth he had been literally "seduced" by the old Scotch ballads. In their archaic but real setting they offered to tormented imaginations a subject-matter at least as rich and more solid than the nightmare-novels then in vogue. Scott's first works were also novels, but in verse: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Marmion, The Lady of the Lake.* Then suddenly Byron robbed him of the palm and success in poetry, because, in works similar to those of Scott, he better expressed the revolt of sentiment and imagination. At first Walter Scott retired from the field. Then, nine years after he had begun *Waverley*, he again took up this prose sketch and finished

it in a few weeks (1814). But in it he remained a poet, a man of imagination. Its success was immense, lightning-like. Scott was already forty years old. At first he did not acknowledge his work, and preserved his anonymity for thirteen years, because he felt that fiction was a descent from poetry. But he continued to write novels tirelessly, and without exhausting his vogue. During the seventeen years from 1815 to 1832, he brought into being an enormous world of fiction: twenty-nine works, of which a score are masterpieces. None of them, save *St. Ronan's Well*, is devoid of an historical or legendary element. Excepting *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth*, they all deal with old Scotland. The mass of Scott's work, his prodigious success, the then fabulous wealth that it brought him, explain that worldly dignity with which the novel thenceforward found itself rehabilitated. Walter Scott lacked none of the qualities necessary to aggrandize the *littérateur* and his genre—neither the unmerited misery into which he was thrown by the failure of his publishers and associates, nor the aureole of courage, of noble probity, which cost him seven years of voluntary slavery and forced labour. This lame man walked straight, and carried the novel further and higher than any man before him.

Why? Because he conferred upon the novel the grandeur of epic poetry. Indubitably a passionate poet was required to infuse these resurrections—there is no other word for them—with that music and, above all, that intense colour which Ruskin has so properly signalized. But no passion or poetry can answer for truth or intensity. He clearly saw the past because he had lived it; because he had lived in it every day and almost every hour of his existence. Hence the concrete and

matter-of-fact quality of his evocations. It is true that he scarcely penetrated more than the surface of his characters and their epoch. He contented himself with sentiments and ideas that belong to all ages. His heroes are sometimes inconsistent and his stories incoherent, because he is primarily concerned with scenes and aspects of life. Still, we must not forget that *The Bride of Lammermoor* is admirably composed, and that his heroes —barring the eccentrics and queer fellows—are creatures of flesh and blood with quite as much life in them as one's contemporaries. Let us recall his John the First, his Louis XI, and Morton and Monkbarns. Life for him was a spectacle rather than a problem. But the immense majority of men see in it, and demand, nothing else. And it was on the opinion of the immense majority that Walter Scott founded the greatness of his work and of his name, and solidly established the virtue of the novel. Thenceforward the novel translated history, supplanted poetry. Between Defoe and Addison, between Fielding and Johnson, there had been a social world. Walter Scott moved among authors as a peer of the realm. After him there is nothing of which the novel is unworthy.

## CHAPTER II

## THE ENGLISH NOVEL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### I

### *The New Century*

We come to the second great "moment" in the evolution of the English novel. It owes its existence and strength to the authors of the eighteenth century, its prestige to Walter Scott. But Dickens and Thackeray, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, George Meredith and Thomas Hardy—to cite only the principal names of this astonishing period—so enlarged the novel's domain and extended its scope that it seems, in the twentieth century, to have absorbed all other literary genres. It is not that it has changed more rapidly: on the contrary, its development has been less sudden than in the eighteenth century. It has opened only a few new moral and psychological fields, for the inner man remains like unto himself. But, aside from the fact that means and objects of exploration became more diverse, the nineteenth century brought to the English novel a rapid succession of new publics, resulting from the triumph of machinism, the emancipation of the middle classes, then of the working masses and their battle with capitalism, the unheard-of discoveries of science and its conflict with religion. In consequence

fiction, although moving along the same paths, encounters new groups in more complex conditions and a more disturbed atmosphere.

The evolution of the novel has been compared to a spiral movement, and the circular staircase has been employed as a metaphor in this connexion. Now if we permit the assumption that an abstraction can move, the curve of British fiction may be said to progress on a horizontal plane—rather than vertically up or down—cutting at each turn the same threads of truth, the same strata of humanity; but a little further along in the sense of duration, and with other aspects, another light, and other densities. In this respect, the nineteenth century—an epoch of universal, accelerated and tumultuous transformation—offered the novel a subject-matter that was especially rich in more than quantity. Thereafter it is the quality, also, of human observation which is found to be more fecund, and hence the principal characteristic of the nineteenth-century English novel.

For more than a century the object of British fiction, as of all British literature, had been the social man rather than man simply. It was an age of relations rather than values. The nineteenth century developed a passionate interest not only in the human being's relations with himself, with others, and with the world, but also, and especially, in the human being in himself, under all possible conditions. In England the great philosophical movement of the eighteenth century resulted in a restoration of the human animal to the first rank of dignity—something that Christianity had never forgotten but never isolated. Thenceforward Creator and creature tend, even for believers, to be confounded in their realization. Not one of the great eighteenth-century novelists had testified,

as Burns was to say, that it is enough for a man to be a man for him to be worthy, even in caricature, of a wondering, respectful or tender attention even in defeat, and of a passionate attention even in the most common, lowly aspects of his life. After Dickens, Thackeray and the Brontës, this element is never absent from British fiction; and when, during the course of the century, man's origin and destiny become objects of passionate inquiry for science and religion—an inquiry more formidable than in any other age—it is inevitable that the novel should become more intensely, more profoundly mingled with the very life of mankind. George Eliot, George Meredith and Thomas Hardy bear witness to this. Here is the explanation of that intensity, that seriousness, which sometimes verges on burlesque, that frequently prophetic tone, that preoccupation with the general in the heart of the particular, that intervention of the eternal in the present, which, even in those most apparently sceptical like Thackeray, distinguish the great novelists of the nineteenth century.

The hope—or illusion—of a moral certainty, of a definitive explanation of life; the obsession of a problem, sometimes of a doctrine, are seldom absent from their work. It is true that the novel, even in its origins, had served as a medium of instruction and propaganda; but now fiction was added to the lesson, sweets were added to the aloes, to make the dose more palatable. In the nineteenth century, doctrine and narrative tend to be confounded. It is the novel itself which is the instruction, or the instruction which is novelesque. There is much sweetened aloes in modern fiction. Didactic intention and tone, and direct intervention of the author, are extended to all fields, to all problems. The novel espouses

politics and sociology, science and conscience; it serves as a common vehicle of intelligence, becomes a universal medium of expression, the omnibus of literature; but it does all this without abdicating its primordial function—to tell a story, to depict, to move—without changing its triple motor: action, analysis, sentiment.

We shall see the weakness of this strength, the artistic fragilities of this architecture; and we shall perceive where we are sometimes led by didactic intention, intrusion of doctrine, and the need of certainty and stability. What should be emphasized here is that the nineteenth century witnessed a development of the novel which was as magnificent, as sudden in its kind, as that of the eighteenth century. Queen Victoria, poor woman, counted for very little in this development, and her contribution was scarcely more than to lay stress upon an already perceptible tendency toward impossible stabilities; but her reign coincided with the splendid effervescence of modern fiction, and it is natural that in this field, too, we should speak of the Victorian Age. The ages of Queen Anne and of Queen Elizabeth had furnished nothing comparable.

Dickens, aged twenty-five, was achieving celebrity at his first stroke when the queen, aged eighteen, was mounting the throne. Thackeray was twenty-six, Charlotte Brontë one and twenty, George Eliot eighteen. Among the other great novelists of the century, Reade, Trollope and Kingsley were reaching the age of manhood, while George Meredith had entered the ranks of this admirable generation nine years before. Hardy was born three years after the queen's accession. It is obvious how simultaneous was the development of English fiction in the

nineteenth century, and to what extent it was correct at the beginning of this study to predict a series of sudden mutations in the British novel.

Human sentiment is the positive factor in the inspiration of this age. It is responsible for its greatness and its strength. But for a long time it vainly waits and effaces itself before a political and social system that has for it the force and fatality of fact.

From Mirabeau to Lamartine, from Babeuf to Blanqui, France lives by revolutions and ends in universal suffrage. In England there are only abortive movements. A double armature protects her. That of the landlords is formed in the eighteenth century, destroying communal life, the small landlord, and peasant solidarity, by the concentration of property. That of the manufacturers, founded on the triumph of the machine, subsequently enslaves and degrades the labourers, while drawing towards itself the men of action. Only thought and speech are revolutionary. The Napoleonic peril has re-established national unity. Britain will remain strictly insular. Between the possessors and those who aspire to possession there is a vast compromise, from which the salaried class is excluded. From the beginning of Victoria's reign, the aristocracy recruits its ranks among the landowners and manufacturers, as the latter have among the merchants and artisans. Material success is the criterion and the sesame. A philosophy that is almost a religion, and a party that is almost a church, are established by utilitarian radicalism. Outside of this there is no salvation. Hell begins before death, and in this world below. It is for the poor, and consists in poverty with all its consequences. Bentham, Mill and Macaulay have professed the utilitarian dogma without this mal-

ediction. But it is in the moral system itself—that is to say, in practice and in life. Anything which is by nature calculated to disturb the social system must necessarily be thrust aside, ignored. The elementary passions which persist and are engendered will remain in the penumbra of consciousness. In actual fact the devil and nature will lose nothing by it, but it will be a breach of faith to say what might be left unsaid, and meritorious to hide what it would be dangerous to confess.

English literature in the nineteenth century is, as always, partly expression and partly criticism of the social system; and, as always, the attack is noisier and more active than the defence. Carlyle, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Newman lead successive waves of assault against established society and established morality. As to the novel, it expresses these systems without defending them, to the extent that it depicts manners, and it is obliged, in order to be read, even printed, to accept on this point the rules of reserve, tolerance and reticence. But it is in opposition and revolt on all other points that it finds realization, life and development. Dickens is the first witness to this truth. For fifty years, from 1835–1840 to 1885–1890, the Victorian novel runs through an immense field at breakneck speed. About 1860 it pauses in mid-course. But after 1870 the rebellion is general until about 1890, the end of the Victorian Age.

## II

### *Dickens, Thackeray and Their Contemporaries*

Dickens, the son of a poor clerk in the navy-pay office at Portsmouth, brought up in the slums of Chatham and

London, with no other education than what he gave himself, began life as a labeller of blacking-pots, and he owed his immense and immediate success to the perfect harmony between his story-telling genius and the lower middle class among whom he had lived. This class had just won economic ease and political independence. It was a mine of energy, intelligence and sentiment. But its members were neither cultivated nor measured in their tastes. Freshly emancipated, they still needed some pretty pictures to look at, even some images to break. By contrast with the grey monotony of their lives and their environment, they had need of tears and laughter, and feared neither excess of colour, sentiment, or humour.

At this point there appeared a young writer of almost hysterical temperament, whose own inventions made him weep with joy and with pride. He was as much an actor as an author. He overflowed with action and with expression. It was Charles Dickens. He had the gift of caricature which is simply exaggeration of the real. He had the freshness of popular imagination, combined with a lower-class emotional fervour and intensity, that permitted him to live his characters while he created them. What does it matter if they fall into an excess of pathos or comedy that touches farce on the one hand and melodrama on the other? What does it matter if they are distinguished by tics, eccentricities, and labels? They live a jerky, luminous, spotty existence that anticipates the early moving pictures. We have never met them, but they live. And with what distinctness, what abundance!

It was by an immense farce that Dickens won his public. The characters of *Pickwick Papers*—beadles, cab-

bies, innkeepers, imprisoned debtors—now extinct and unknown to our generation, should be forgotten, indistinct. Their comedy recalls Christmas pantomines. And the footlights shine wanly on the burlesques of yesterday. But these acrobats, these puppets, are made of immortal stuff. Behold Mr. Pickwick. At the last his humanity and charity are as discreetly touching as their naïveté has appeared noisily comic.

Indeed, it was preoccupation with humanity, suffering and human dignity, that, without his suspecting it, without his doing anything but follow the instinct of his heart and of his gifts, was now to inspire Dickens in the incoherent revolt of his whole work against the social order in which he was immersed. After having made his public laugh, he was now to make them weep—sometimes in pity, sometimes in indignation—over those who belonged neither to the possessive nor aspiring classes, and who lived in the earthly hell engendered by utilitarian civilization. Quest of the sensational? Pursuit of *scènes à faire?* No doubt; but equally and more apparent is the instinct of social health.

At first Dickens leads his readers into the sombre quarters where infancy is trained in crime (*Oliver Twist*, 1839); and side by side with effects that seem cheap to us to-day, we meet in the depths of the London underworld creatures and scenes that no one since Defoe and Smollett had depicted with such meticulous fidelity. "The Artful Dodger" is an example.

Then it is the martyrdom and revolt of pupils in the jails of youth (*Nicholas Nickleby*); the riots of *Barnaby Rudge* (1840); the melodramatic atmosphere of *Old Curiosity Shop* (1841); and, after a first voyage to the United States, the caricature in *Martin Chuzzlewit*

(1843) of the British caricatures then current in America. At last an autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*,—more measured and more serene—closes the series of Dickens' first masterpieces. He repeats himself in *Bleak House* (1852) and in *Little Dorrit* (1855); comes to grief in *Hard Times* (1854); approaches history through melodrama in *The Tale of Two Cities* (1859); and ends the second series of his great novels with two better-constructed books, *Great Expectations* (1861) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864).

All his gifts led him into excess: excess of imagination, that led to caricature; excess of sentiment and humour, that led to crude effects of tears and laughter; excess of colour, excess of verve, and a Grub-street romanticism well suited to his public while shocking to the exquisites. But behind all these excesses which compromise the value of Dickens' novels, the mysterious gift of life—which is never excessive—renders them unforgettable. His was an imagination at once so realistic and so powerful that he did not copy but created types. His work is a fair of strange people. Let us not demand of Dickens what he had not to give.

Neither a man of letters nor of delicate taste, he wrote for the contemporary crowd and succeeded, nevertheless, in reaching the élite, even of posterity. Neither thinker nor even conscious moralist—although he wrote either to reform or to denounce—he remained bourgeois, conventional, in his depiction of manners. Yet even the platitudes of his inspiration have such verve that they resemble paradoxes. He has made mankind tremble in his books; but it is the trembling of movement against atmosphere, of life against death. One may discuss Dickens: it is impossible to forget him.

It is a commonplace to oppose Dickens to his great contemporary Thackeray. Everything invites the comparison. They were writing at the same time, but Thackeray achieved success more tardily. He was reserved, delicate; he had taste and a style. He does not drive home truths, he unfolds them. In his work comedy is as measured, but as penetrating, as pathos is discreet and effective. His characters do not move all in a piece. He comments on them, but they reveal themselves and they have no need of labels. They are people of fashion and good breeding, excepting the servants, who never lapse into vulgarity. Thackeray's psychology is acute and profound. There are real women in his books. He observes an instructive restraint in the presence of grief and death, the mystery of love and the mystery of religion. His emotion is marked by neither gestures nor cries. He touches the heart without gripping it, life without trepidation. In these divers respects the contrast is natural, inevitable, between the two greatest novelists of the first half of the nineteenth century. But how much more instructive, as regards the development of the novel, is what they shared in common!

Thackeray, an officer's son, educated at public schools and at Cambridge, heir to a considerable fortune, was of an origin totally different from Dickens', and did not encounter adversity from birth. But he lost or wasted his fortune. His wife went mad. Painfully he had to reestablish himself by journalism. At thirty he was in Paris as a correspondent. Like Dickens (*Sketches by Boz*), he first published note-books (*The Paris Sketch-book*, 1840; *The Irish Sketch-book*, 1843) and then adventure stories. *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (published in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1844) is the last of the

picaresque novels and the first of those more than half original pastiches in which Thackeray, with *Esmond*, was to furnish the model of another genre.

In *Barry Lyndon* there is already plenty of talent, talent of a literary order, that of a man who has read much, and particularly an irony of the French sort, which espouses—without betraying itself otherwise than by an imperceptible smile—the viewpoint of the gentleman adventurer. How different from the expansive and noisy humour of *Pickwick Papers!* M. Abel Hermant has revived this kind of dry-point etching. But between *M. de Courpière* and *Barry Lyndon* there is the difference that separates the *Vie parisienne* from *Punch*.

England's great satiric weekly was just beginning at this time, and for ten years, 1843–1853, Thackeray assiduously contributed to it. It was in *Punch* that he published his *Book of Snobs*. As he uses the word, a snob is one who vulgarly admires vulgar things. In his books Thackeray never ceased ridiculing the snob, without himself entirely escaping snobbery, a respect for "the correct thing" simply because it is "the correct thing." But he knew himself, while the true snob does not.

In 1847, *Vanity Fair* established the reputation of Thackeray. Here is a capital work in the development of the nineteenth-century novel: without heroes and without villains, without callousness or sentimentality, in which virtue is never without fault nor vice without excuse, copied from life, often grey and sordid, shot through with selfish motives and knavery, but lighted too by some rays of tenderness and generosity, true yet not cynical, innocent of spangles or tinsel, badly composed, filled with digressions as was every book that Thackeray wrote, but admirably observed and faithfully transcribed.

Even Becky Sharp, the little female demon who unrolls her skein of artifice through the centre of the book, is not entirely artificial.

*Pendennis* (1850), which is autobiographical, and *The Newcomes* (1855) are depictions of contemporary life analogous to *Vanity Fair* in subjects, characters, and quality. *Esmond* (1852) and its inferior successor *The Virginians* (1859) inaugurate a kind of historical but not romantic novel that Walter Scott would have been at a loss how to write. *Esmond* is the copious, slow work of a great artist in historic literature—whence its immense renown in the universities; an evocation, internally and stylistically, of Queen Anne's time, innocent of bric-à-brac; but still an hors-d'œuvre in the banquet that Thackeray was to leave to posterity.

Here, as elsewhere, he shared with Dickens weakness in composition, and that power, that intensity in the art of characterization which comes from contact and sympathy with man in himself. Each wrote for his *milieu*, for his public. When we juxtapose them, we have a picture of the society of their day. Each assiduously intervened in his stories: Thackeray by commentaries, Dickens by scenic combinations. Both are destitute of philosophy; both are traditionalists, stuffed with humour and sentiment, infected with morality and respectability; and both pause before those realities of love and passion or the simple emotional life that neither their great predecessors nor their great successors have ignored. With all their genius, one feels in them the Germanic social influence. By what they leave unsaid, as much as by their utterances, they are "Victorians," and Victorians of the Prince Consort. It is the women, the Brontës and later George Eliot, who began the emancipation.

I have mentioned neither the droll, pious and gentle Miss Mitford, who, in *Our Village*, recalls Jane Austen, nor the truculent literary posterity of Scott, all bedight with historic tinsel: John Galt, who died in 1839, and Horace Smith, who died in 1849; the prolific G. P. R. James, who ended in wilful burlesque (1779–1860); and Ainsworth, who continued to build innumerable archaic machines until the year 1882. Wilkie Collins, who carried on Dickens' work in certain respects, was master of the feuilleton and was a thinking Gaboriau: Conan Doyle is his heir. Thomas Love Peacock, Shelley's friend and Meredith's father-in-law, although a contemporary of Scott and then of Dickens, resembled no one but himself. He allowed a fantastic imagination, served by a beautiful style, to stifle his other gifts.

There are some writers of so plastic a nature that they seem to have been thrown into their century for the purpose of repeating all its cries and imitating all its movements. Such an one was Edward Bulwer, the first Lord Lytton. Successively he produced imitations of Byron and Scott, domestic realism and historic romanticism, stories of low crime and of high society. Then he turned psychologist after the manner of George Eliot, became mystic, scientific, prophetic in *The Coming Race*, and even attempted the novel of the other world. He was an opportunist, a politician of literature, quite like Disraeli, whose novels are no more than coloured sketches.

Anthony Trollope (1815–1882), on the contrary, was the faithful, abundant and meticulous chronicler of English provincial towns, of clergymen's families in the shadow of their cathedrals, of families and groups that perpetuate social existence in the country. This author, who was a postal official most of his life, wrote his books

with the regularity of mechanical production—so many words an hour, each morning before breakfast. Better perhaps than anyone else, he represented the calm, unhurried life, and satisfied the solid, tranquil tastes of middle-class Victorian England.

Charles Reade (1814–1884) merits no less attention, because of the truly original genius, always faithfully and passionately documented, which he brought to the writing of his social and historical novels. Along with that of Charles Kingsley (1819–1875)—socialist Christian, poet, novelist and reformer—the names and works of Charles Reade and Anthony Trollope are now being resurrected; and, after this revision of values, Trollope's novels will occupy in nineteenth-century English fiction a place very close to Thackeray's.

## III

### *Victorian Women Novelists*

A group of greatly talented women—Mrs. Gaskell, the biographer of the Brontës (1810–1865); Miss Harriet Martineau, the translator of Comte (1802–1876); Charlotte Yonge (1823–1901), interpreter of Keble and the Oxford Movement; Mrs. Oliphant (1828–1897), historian and essayist—in company with their obscure and innumerable sisters, maintained throughout the nineteenth century the current of feminine fiction which has flowed unceasingly through English literature. Indeed, it is an error heightened by impertinence to be astonished, as though it were unexpected or paradoxical, when one contemplates the share that women have had in the development of the contemporary English novel.

Why should this share not be equal and even superior to that of the men? Is it not apparent that women are destined for this work, by their nature, by their gifts, and by their life? It will be said that there were fewer women novelists in the preceding centuries. There were fewer men novelists, too; and, most important, there were infinitely fewer readers of both sexes. Nevertheless Jane Austen was preceded by Mrs. Behn, Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lenox, Frances Brooke, Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Radcliffe, Mrs. Inchbald, Lady Morgan, Mrs. Opie, Fanny Burney, Mary Brunton, Miss Edgeworth and numberless others.

In the nineteenth century the English women novelists are legion, and all subjects are theirs. But the quantity of artists signifies much less than the quality of art, and the extension of domain much less than the kind of cultivation. Now woman has always been more apt than man at the infinite interplay of human relations that has become the subject and object of the English novel. The relations, the reactions of human being to human being, of character to character, have been throughout the ages the business of woman's whole existence: love, marriage, maternity, family and social life. In this respect the women novelists of the nineteenth century did scarcely more than continue the work of their predecessors, and none of them surpassed Jane Austen. But, as we have seen, the nineteenth century was concerned with human values at least as much as with human relationships. Now, penetration of man himself, by sentiment, by instinct, and also by emotional analysis; the affective, spontaneous discernment of what is essential in the individual; the acuity of sympathy that not only makes one laugh with those who laugh, but also, with

more repercussion, suffer with those who suffer—all this, that was demanded by the nineteenth century, the woman, more than the man, was capable of bringing to the novel. It is in this sense that we must understand Meredith's sally: "Woman will be the last thing civilized by man." That is to say, she is the last thing whose nature he will curb.

The call of sex and of race sounds more strongly in her. It is her business as well as her privilege. Hers is the gift created by the necessity of discerning and feeling more vividly affinities as well as contrasts. More especially, she has leisure, desire, pleasure. Then, too, she goes further in discipline—for she is born a disciple —provided that she loves; and further in indiscipline, for she is irreducible save by love.

It is constantly necessary to return to revolt, the life-spring of fiction, when one is explaining the evolution of the British novel. Women were great novelists in the nineteenth century because they could not endure—without the assent of instinct, nature and love—the bonds imposed upon them by the utilitarian civilization of their time.

After Jane Austen, there was a disquiet, an irritation, in the work of the women novelists that could not but increase at the expense of their time and their contemporaries. Women formed the advance guard in movements for the reform of marriage, divorce, sanitary and social laws. More forcibly than men, they expressed that battle of the sexes which is compact of love and hate. It is possible—I am not certain—that the long democratic and mercantile peace in which two or three generations of Englishmen lived without risk to life had obscurely exasperated the profound and collective instinct of the

women who are risking their lives at every childbirth. It is possible that the holocaust of the great war has crushed this grievance and resuscitated masculine prestige.

What is certain is that in the nineteenth century the superficial and satisfied tone of women's letters was repudiated by the women of letters. When Diana, the novelist, and the delicious Emma, her friend, talked heart to heart of subjects that "endeared the hours to them," they were aware, says Meredith, "that the English of the period would have laughed a couple of women to scorn for venturing on them, and they were not a little hostile in consequence, and shot their epigrams profusely, applauding the keener that appeared to score the giant bulk of their intolerant enemy, who holds the day, but not the morrow. Us too he holds for the day, to punish us if we have temporal cravings. He scatters his gifts to the abject; tossing to us rebels bare dog-biscuit. But the life of the spirit is beyond his region; we have our morrow in his day when we crave nought of him."

And so: "Diana and Emma delighted to discover that they were each the rebel of their earlier and less experienced years, each a member of the malcontent minor faction, the salt of the earth, to whom their salt must serve for nourishment, as they admitted, relishing it determinedly, not without gratification."

It is the misfortune of too rapid excursions into woods that are too thick that the trees, we are told, hide the forest. One should seek "points of view." But what an artificial way of knowing the woods, to look at them only from above, so that they form a screen! In this case it is the forest that prevents one from seeing the trees. I do not refuse, as is obvious, to clamber up the posts of obser-

vation and show "the panorama" when occasion demands. But my object is to traverse the woods along avenues that others have made, and along a few small paths of my own, and to pause before the most beautiful, the most vigorous, or the most singular trees. Here, now, are three pale, tormented birches, thrust up from the same root, with spots of rust and blood upon their bark.

The most pathetic novel of the Brontë sisters is their death. Since the publication of M. E. Dimnet's excellent book, *Charlotte Brontë et ses sœurs*, there is no longer an excuse for anyone in France being ignorant of their exceptional lives.

The year 1821. A poor and desolate parsonage in the harshest, bleakest country-side of northern England. Six small children. The mother is dead; the father heedless, absent-minded. An unknown heredity (drink, phthisis) secretly shapes the fates of these precocious infants. The lonely children, five little girls and a boy, spend their lives in one room, where they read, write, and tell one another stories. Their greatest pleasure is to go out on to the bleak moor to gather heather, holding hands to brace themselves against the wind. In 1824, the four eldest girls are sent to a utilitarian school for the daughters of poor clergymen—a breeding-place of misery and tuberculosis. Board and clothing complete for 15 pounds a year. The two eldest, Maria and Elizabeth, die within a month in the following year. In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë was to describe that school, sadly and bitterly; and the little martyr Helen Burns is her sister Maria.

Charlotte, aged ten, and Emily, aged eight, return to Haworth. During the four years from 1826 to 1830, the four children write a small library. Their father does nothing. They have no other distraction. Without

knowing it, frankly and without pedantry, they are persons of letters. At the age of fifteen, Charlotte's share in this mass of manuscripts is twenty-three note-books of between sixty and a hundred pages, crammed with microscopic writing. She is already "a little old woman," in the words of one of her friends who visits Haworth shortly after this. She has tiny hands, a small body; she is neat and well-deported, short-sighted as a mole, with a bewildered air; and her strange, large brown eyes burn when she is animated. Emily is solitary, wild, and carelessly dressed. One year spent as a boarder in a good school at Roe Head, which is going to be the *milieu* of *Shirley*. Then a new stay at the parsonage, various positions as governess, several returns to Haworth, two unaccepted proposals of marriage from two droll curates who fail to please; after which, Charlotte sets off with Emily for Brussels, in February, 1843, in order to learn French thoroughly before opening a school with her sisters at Haworth. Charlotte and Emily are now aged twenty-six and twenty-four. Brussels is *Villette;* the *pensionnat* of Mme. Beck is the *Pensionnat* Héger, whose director and directress were to play a great rôle in Charlotte's life. The Paul Emmanuel of *Villette,* who awakens such passion in Lucy and Ginevra, is M. Héger.

There were infinite depths in the souls of these two sisters. We shall, perhaps, never know what secret and poignant drama Charlotte lived at Brussels; but there is no longer reason to doubt that she loved Héger, and may have become his creature, perhaps his creation, and in any case his possession. As to Emily, the secret is absolute. It was to Haworth that she was bound by her very fibre. And to Haworth the sisters returned in 1844. In 1845, their brother Branwell, the hope of the family, went under;

first in the scandal of a culpable love, then in debauchery, drunkenness, and opium. He was soon a ruin. Their father was becoming blind; an operation was necessary. The project of the school was abandoned. Charlotte was thirty, Emily twenty-eight, Anne twenty-six. Together they published their poems, under assumed names, and succeeded in selling a total of two copies. Each of the sisters had a novel in manuscript. Charlotte did not succeed in placing her *Professor*—the first form of *Villette*—novel of her heart, flesh of her flesh. But she was in the process of finishing *Jane Eyre*, which, on the contrary, met with immediate favour, was published within six months, and won a startling success of scandal and admiration.

Emily's book, *Wuthering Heights*, published in the same year, remained unknown. In September, 1848, Branwell died: opium, phthisis, delirium tremens. In December, Emily died, upright, enigmatic, wild. In April, 1849, Anne died, sweet and resigned. Charlotte loved and cared for them all until the end. Exhausted as she was, she managed to finish her second novel, *Shirley*, which appeared in October, 1849. She made four trips to London, but without becoming a woman of letters. She wished to be only a woman, a clergyman's daughter, a villager—in fine, herself. It was at Haworth that she revised her first book, *The Professor*, with infinite care, and made it into *Villette*, which appeared in January, 1853. Her task was done. The celebrated novelist who did not desire glory, the suffering woman who expected nothing of fate, was yet willing to accept with pallid joy a loveless marriage. She was thirty-seven. The following year she died enceinte.

I have written a summary of this life because, despite sensational plots, there is almost nothing in the life and

character of Charlotte Brontë that is not also in her novels.

We are not in England, and we no longer have to be tender of memories that are still alive. Charlotte Brontë's husband died in 1906. Long before his death Mrs. Gaskell published a bluntly sincere *Life* which provoked a famous suit because of what it had to say regarding the relations between Branwell and Mrs. Robinson. The respect and delicacy which are natural and correct towards women, even of genius, should not prevent us from saying that the Brontës were, above everything else, women, and unsatisfied women. The chief service of their genius, in the history of the English novel, was to introduce, make manifest, and impose—in despite of scandal —the all-powerfulness of the sexual instinct, source of all nature and all life. I hope and wish to be neither brutal nor paradoxical, but in my opinion it is impossible to ignore this considerable fact. In the full flush of the Victorian Age, the Brontë sisters made love and woman confess. And they drew the confession from their own hearts, from their own lives. This was an act of enormous boldness, a formidable novelty.

There is a great deal besides in the work of the Brontës: sensational plots, infantile construction, Byronic characters; in some places, in *Jane Eyre* and in *Wuthering Heights*, a reminder of Mrs. Radcliffe; in *Villette* and in *Shirley*, the example of Jane Austen; the truth which comes from experience; the crying autobiography of the governess; the superhuman and almost inhuman imagination of Emily in *Wuthering Heights;* the highest romanticism interwoven with the most precise realism; and novel and passionate intensity of tone, without a desire to prove anything or to teach anything.

All these, and many other points besides, should undoubtedly be noted were we concerned only with the Brontë sisters. But our business is their place and their influence in the development of the English novel. As regards this, the capital fact—in a time when, as we have seen, fiction was reaching toward what is essential in the human being—is that they unconsciously, the more naïvely because of their ignorance, expressed the very essence of woman: her aspiration, her incorporation, her "possession" by love. In this respect they played a rôle analogous to that of George Sand, whose work they knew and admired. Charlotte Brontë observed: "It is *poetry*, as I comprehend it, which elevates that masculine George Sand, and makes out of something coarse, something Godlike." The formula is significant.

Virtuous girls, unconsciously haunted by their sex, ignorant, both victims of a morbid heredity that served to exaggerate their obsession, condemned by fate to the shabby slavery of a governess's life, crushed by celibacy, sickness and poverty, limited in experience, and subject to the reticence of their age, incapable of a coarse word, of a physical precision, of a sensual allusion, these two women expressed the very essence of life with only the words of heart and soul. Love in itself, the vital instinct: such was their subject.

It was a pygmy's challenge, a provocation unconscious of itself. And their age was not deceived as to what they meant. There is no coarseness in the novels of the Brontë sisters; but the scandal was none the less immense. Old ladies turned away their heads as though from an appearance of nakedness. In comparison with the passages of humour, observation and simple narrative, the space occupied by love scenes is modest; but the accent on these

scenes is such that one hears nothing else. Hark to the whispered passion of Rochester, to the naïve and imprudent acquiescence of Jane Eyre. "Here," says M. Dimnet, "is a scene that Shakespeare would not disown, but one that we could tear from the volume with infinite relief." And speaking of another scene, that in the carriage, he says: "Never were the egotism and untroubled shamelessness of triumphant passion shown more nakedly." Hark, in *Wuthering Heights*, to the chant of "dominant sexuality" that dominates the whole book. Here love is "a sovereign attraction in which matter has no share" (expressed) but of which souls are the *unresisting* playthings. "He is more I than myself," says the beloved in speaking of her lover. "Where," asks Maeterlinck, "did this Emily, who so innocently skirts the external realities of love, learn of those internal realities which touch the profoundest depths of human passion? It would seem that she must have lived thirty years (why thirty?) most ardently enchained by the most ardent kisses in order to know what she knows, to dare to show us with such infallible certainty and exactitude, in the delirium of the two predestined lovers, the utterly contradictory movements of tenderness which wishes to cause suffering, and of cruelty that desires to bestow happiness, of repulsion that desires, and of desire drunk with repulsion."

In all other respects there is a world of difference between *Wuthering Heights* and the books of Charlotte. But this obsession, this divination, this possession by love —chaste in form, burning and naïvely shameless in principle—is also to be found in the pure Caroline of *Shirley* and in the troubled Lucy of *Villette*. Neither Charlotte nor Emily had any knowledge of men, and they lost their

heads when they spoke of them. Men, for them, were brutal, enigmatic creatures, disconcerting and captivating strangers, more masculine than nature, from whom one suffered, without revolt and even with pleasure, mysterious crudities.

The author knows nothing of lovers, and the lovers know nothing of love; but the woman, and the heroine, are lighted and consumed by it, and suddenly the English novel, the feminine novel, undergoes one of the greatest transformations that it has yet experienced. Charlotte was unconscious of her revolt. She was sincerely distressed when the reviews reproached her with what they called her paganism, her lack of discipline. "A great coarseness of taste," said the *Edinburgh Review*, "and a pagan doctrine. . . ." "Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre" (note the divination of the spinsters), said a certain Miss Rigby, under the anonymity and with the power of the *Quarterly Review*, "is pre-eminently an anti-christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor . . . a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man . . . ungodly discontent." A little later the *North American Review* expressed itself in the same terms.

The reviews were mistaken to raise the cry of immorality. But they were right to denounce in Charlotte Brontë's work a rupture of the novel with morality. George Eliot was going to reunite them.

Here is a strange paradox. Two village teachers, provincials by birth, temperament and conviction—the one a tall, heroic, stoical school-marm, somewhat wild and unruly: the other a little governess, prematurely old, hiding

her generous soul, with the air of an owl in the sun, frightened at the noise she is making—these two great hearts, lacking amenity and grace, create a great stir in the literary and moral worlds, and win for woman the right of confessing herself in love, without themselves having, apparently, known anything of love except the vigil, the instinct and the hope. Arrives a learned woman, an intellectual, so free in thought as to deny all dogma, so free in conduct as to practise love openly without marriage. And she it is who re-establishes moral law in the novel.

Born on a farm, brought up in a provincial and puritanical atmosphere, very intelligent—and aware of the fact—she was transported, at the age of twenty-one, to Coventry, a religious and philosophic *milieu*. There she lost her faith. At thirty-two she became assistant-editor of the *Westminster Reviews*, in London, where she came in daily contact with the most advanced thinkers and writers in England. She frequented the company of Froude, Carlyle, Newman and Martineau. It was then that she met George Lewes, and lived with him without marrying him. She did not repent her act; but the story of this liaison is yet to be written. Meanwhile, it must be noted that George Eliot, in all her work, displayed a deep respect and regret for the faith that she had left, the convention she had violated, and the marriage she had ignored. We shall have a clearer understanding of George Eliot's art when her life is completely known to us.

It was a return to her girlhood past that made her a novelist at about the age of forty. *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and *Silas Marner* (1861) are all memories of her country life, and her greatest books—*Adam Bede* standing out sharply from the rest. The intellectual, the learned

woman, won glory not by knowledge but by experience.

Either she did not realize it, or she did not believe it. Once she was installed in her pulpit, she thought she could teach philosophy and morality through her novels. The depths of poetry and understanding that were in her could never wholly disappear; but she created types rather than individuals, she proceeded explicitly by inductions and deductions—dear to Spencer—instead of simply describing and narrating, and she divided the world into species and categories. *Romola* (1863) is a historical reconstruction of Florence; *Felix Holt* (1866) is a picture of political life with an anecdote of a vanished heir; in *Middlemarch* (1872), which marks a return to country life, three love stories are interminably intermingled with three currents of religious and philosophic thought. *Daniel Deronda* (1876) is a novel of the Jewish race that is powerful, interesting to study, interminable to read, and devoid of either great life or virtue.

In fine, George Eliot, whose reputation is undergoing a severe revision, appears to have exercised no durable influence save by her first novels. *The Mill on the Floss* is a feeble book that continues to exist by virtue of almost nothing except the autobiographical element in Maggie Tulliver. But—barring the first chapters and the sixth book—almost all of *Adam Bede* is admirable. In the introduction to the second book it contains the better part of George Eliot's artistic doctrine. Adam is an unforgettable creation, and Mrs. Poyser an unforgettable creature. That a man might at once be amorous and religious, and perfectly sincere without falling either into the frying-pan or the fire, that he might at once be a peasant, a workman, and a gentleman, that he might at once have hot blood and a cool head—all this seems

impossible. But such is the character of Adam Bede. For George Eliot, Dinah Morris was the heroine. But we find her impersonal, improbable, and a little repellant. The crux of the book is the crime and punishment of Hetty Sorrel. Nothing could be more pathetic than Hetty's two journeys at the end of Book V. After her condemnation, the book is finished. Here, as in almost all of George Eliot's novels, there is something profoundly human in the development of action and character; but there is also something profoundly inhuman, inexorable and Hebraic in the development of consequences. Positivism is joined to the Old Testament. And this is the point which brings us back to George Eliot's share, following that of the Brontës, in the development of the English novel.

There is no reason, thinks George Eliot, why feminine emancipation should be attributed to instinct. It is on intelligence that the internal city will be founded, and intelligence can be satisfied only by a system. Positivism, evolution, modern psychology—in short, science as represented by Herbert Spencer, the great inspirer and friend of George Eliot—form the foundation of the moral and æsthetic edifice in which the novel is to install itself with George Eliot. Religious emotion is not forbidden admission: it cannot be, for it is at the bottom of all feeling. Fiction in which it is not present, under one form or another, must be lacking not only in emotion of any sort but also in internal truth. In order to express it, one must have felt it in a novel form or experienced it in its ancient form and retained a nostalgia for it. It may take its origin from the man in God quite as well as from the God in man. George Eliot drinks from the two springs. She has been a Christian:

she is a positivist. But truth is everywhere the same. Human dignity is no less exigeant, whether it is founded on miraculous redemption or on natural evolution. There can be no error without punishment, no fault without consequences. Logical necessity and moral fatality are mutually confounded, and there is nothing, even to a kind of economic immanence, which does not depend on them. Such is George Eliot's inspiration; as far removed from a superficial piety as from the simple objectivism of Jane Austen or from Charlotte Brontë's passionate instinct. Whether there was perhaps a kind of spontaneous politics in this turn-about of the novel, in this submission of the emancipated woman to the same rules and sanctions as the traditional woman, or whether it was due to the all-powerful influence of a society that was free in its ideas and a slave in its public conduct, does not matter: the fact is there.

The novel of George Eliot is not less realistic than that of Charlotte Brontë. On the contrary, it is much more so. It starkly shows things whose evocation could not have been suffered by woman in the first half of the nineteenth century. It shows them in detail, it applies to them that passion for precise truth which is an appanage of scientific education. To all things and all beings it pays its homage of study and sympathetic observation. It is the enemy of false romanticism and the improbable events that were still cherished by the Brontës.

One conjectures what is lacking in this kind of a novel. It is too intellectual. So soon as it becomes systematic, it ceases to be alive. The work of the Brontës was only a beginning. Had they lived, they would probably have left their romanticism by the wayside, and evolved toward a more precise realism and a psychology less subordinate

to instinct. They would have turned out less intelligent, less well-balanced *Adam Bede's* and *Mill on the Floss's*. But they would not have ended in *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda*. And they would never have written *Marcella* or *Robert Elsmere*.

It is impossible, in a book of this sort, to adhere strictly to the chronological order. Meredith, Hardy and Samuel Butler, for example, are men of the twentieth century, although they wrote in the midst of the Victorian Age. Mrs. Humphry Ward, despite the fact that she prolonged her remarkable literary activity until our own day, properly belongs to the Victorian epoch. Her work, dominated by the supposed conflict between science and religion, between democracy and culture, continued, without eclipsing, that of George Eliot. She began with the thesis novel to end in the political and social novel; while George Eliot took leave of the *milieu* and memories of her youth to arrive at social, moral and historic problems, and lose herself in them. These two evolutions are contrary in direction, but analogous in results.

In her own time Mrs. Humphry Ward enjoyed great success, and her first books won her an immense renown; but her literary influence, which was never considerable, is now almost null. In England whole books are published on contemporary literature in which she is not even mentioned.[1]

It is permissible to regret this decrial. For millions of readers Mrs. Humphry Ward has translated the pre-

[1] For example, those of Gilbert K. Chesterton and Prof. J. W. Cunliffe. William Lyon Phelps writes that Mrs. Humphry Ward never wrote a novel, but that she almost wrote one: *David Grieve*.

occupations of her age, and described long and skilfully a considerable portion of English life and society at the end of the nineteenth century. Thanks to her, we foreigners have been able to traverse some of the most interesting regions of thought, action and existence in the most cultivated spheres of present-day England. We cannot but be grateful to her for the high and wholesome intellectual recreation that her life of noble labour has procured us. But it were vain to discuss the judgments and preferences of our neighbours. When one studies the English novel of the last twenty years, one is indeed compelled to state that the work of Mrs. Humphry Ward, while occupying an honourable place, has exercised only the most restrained of influences and forces.

"Literary glory is nominal," said Remy de Gourmont, "literary life is personal." The one is the legitimate and infinitely honourable fruit of merited success; and Mrs. Humphry Ward, more than anyone else in the present generation of English novelists, had occasion to appreciate its savour. The other is the belated and uncertain harvest of temperament and personality, the frequent privilege of writers who have no other, the recompense of those who put much of themselves in their works and are not merely echoes of their age, their world or the books they have read.

Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and—in another, narrower sense—Samuel Butler are enjoying to-day this literary life which is withdrawing from George Eliot and deserting Mrs. Humphry Ward.

In all her work, Mrs. Ward seems to have approached life by way of intelligence, books, and ideas. She makes

no excuses for this. Her talent is primarily collegiate, academic. Over the ever solid framework of social or historic facts, of religious, political or social phenomena, she throws the draperies of a skilful fiction. On the sentiments and opinions to which she gives human form, and human speech, she adjusts the clothes of a gentleman and the dresses of a lady. But one is conscious of the framework beneath the drapery, of the abstraction beneath the character. For the lack of humour, grace and gaiety in these books one can console oneself the better because Mrs. Humphry Ward never pretended to these qualities. The leaven of her work is intellectual; rarely does the creative instinct manifest itself in it. Mrs. Humphry Ward was dedicate to those distinguished vulgarizations which are the object of public lectures. Even in her social novels she managed to impart a deal of instruction. This is no trifle. How many of our most celebrated, best-accredited novelists, crowned by academies, have never done anything else! This is enough to win literary glory and success, which is a fact. But something else is required to command that influence, that literary life, which is not only a fact but a force.

By her origin, her talents and her life, Mrs. Humphry Ward was destined to controversy. Her father, Thomas Arnold, son of the great master of Rugby, was converted to Catholicism, abandoned it, and then returned to it. The daughter was brought up and lived at Oxford. She married a most remarkable professor. She spent her whole life in the atmosphere of universities and in the most cultivated society of her country. One is aware of the fact.

A number of her novels are primarily theological and ecclesiastical, steeped in morality and philosophy, such as: *Robert Elsmere*, her first and her greatest success (1888); *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898); and *The Case of Richard Meynell* (1911). Others are more political or sociological, as: *Marcella* (1894); *Sir George Tressady* (1896); and *The Coryston Family* (1913). This last novel touches upon almost all the problems that disturbed the preceding generation. *David Grieve* (1892) was an intellectual panorama of the same sort, with more sharply defined features. In other books of less vast intention, the characters are openly linked to anecdotal history, without losing any of their truth or their modernity. *Lady Rose's Daughter* (1903), for example, recalls the fate of Mlle. de Lespinasse; *The Marriage of William Ashe* (1905) that of Lady Caroline Lamb; and *Fenwick's Career* (1906) the career of Haydon. Of these pictures of contemporary life, *Eltham House* is one of the most favourably known in France.

It would be necessary to cite the whole of this immense work if one were to show how Mrs. Humphry Ward has succeeded in representing and translating contemporary English life. It is quite superfluous to ask what portion of this will endure. All these books will live in a certain sense. It will, for example, be very difficult henceforward to picture England at the end of the nineteenth century without recourse to the multiple and monumental image of it left by Mrs. Humphry Ward. Nothing more comprehensive, more *intelligent*, in every sense of these words, could be conceived. In this respect, whatever the vicissitudes of her fame, the author of *Robert Elsmere* is certain to survive.

## IV

### *George Meredith and Thomas Hardy*

Does one realize that George Meredith was a contemporary of George Eliot, and that his *Richard Feverel,* for example, was published in 1859, the same year as *Adam Bede?*

Nothing is more deceptive than dates. Meredith's heroes move vainly in a Victorian *milieu;* from the first their ideas are at the opposite pole. Dickens and Thackeray, the Brontës and George Eliot, were in conflict with their age. Meredith had already passed it by. English novelists between 1840 and 1870 were fighting against the compromise and the conventions of Victorian civilization. Meredith had prematurely escaped from them. As regarded economic and moral life, the rôle and condition of women, the relations of the sexes, marriage conditions, and the very meaning of human life, he had silently outstripped his contemporaries by at least fifty years.

Meredith's isolation in the midst of his age was a cause, at least as much as a consequence, of his ideas and of his art. We have neither the whole right nor all the means to furnish an explanation of this phenomenon: in the early years of his life there are circumstances which are not yet sufficiently clear for us to evaluate them. This free spirit, the least tinged with Germanism, was educated in Germany under the discipline of the Moravian brothers. At the age of sixteen he returned to England; at twenty-two he married the daughter of the novelist Thomas Love Peacock; and thereafter, as much for reasons of economy

and necessity as by taste, he lived in the country near his new family, enjoying little contact with society. The influence of his father-in-law is far from being foreign to his formation, and would be worthy of a serious study. It is not pure chance that bound to the land, throughout their whole lives, two of the greatest English poets and novelists of the nineteenth century, Meredith and Hardy. We shall see, for example, that the land is the common inspirer of their art and their philosophy, radically different as they are.

The other reason for Meredith's isolation, for the long incomprehension of which he was the object, is his style. In the case of any other novelist it would be paradoxical to examine first the form and the language in which he expressed himself. Dealing with Meredith, it is a necessity. The first virtue of a writer seems to be the ability to communicate with the public. Meredith's first care was to isolate himself by the systematic rather than natural (for he is capable on occasion of expressing himself distinctly and clearly) adoption of a style that requires initiation. He had to create an audience for himself, force his readers to learn his language; and this task required no less a time than his whole life. For a foreigner —even when he knows English by origin and by history, by usage and by profession—the barrier is still higher. And he must be excused if he does not always clear it. No one would wish that Meredith had written other than as Meredith. It is utterly useless to seek a quarrel with him. He would cease to be himself were he more accessible. But it was not entirely the public's fault that he remained so long ununderstood and unknown.

What, then, is this style? Once more it is necessary to excuse the ignorance of even the most industrious and

best-prepared foreigner, and to credit him with the candour, not the pretension, of ignorance. In the sixteenth century we saw Spanish Gongorism take the form of British Euphuism. Meredith is a John Lyly become a great poet. There is no derogation here. Shakespeare, too, practised Euphuism. But this practice demands a little interpretation. It consists principally in speaking in metaphors, images and comparisons. Meredith is a precious writer, often of genius and rarely ridiculous; but ridiculous sometimes, however, in the opinion of a French reader. He speaks like a musician—indirectly, powerfully, sometimes indistinctly. He does not seek to astonish, to surprise. It is his nature, first or second. In the hands of a dolt, Meredith's plumed, scintillating and suggestive style would become an instrument of torture or an object of derision. At the service of a writer such as Meredith, it requires an effort—too much, it will be said—but it achieves marvels. It is a drag-net, so be it, but a drag-net of large pearls; and it only an exceptional one of these enormous gems that contains a small oyster. But there are some. I ask pardon of the idolaters. One must open and look. When one reads over the passage quoted above, regarding the conversations of Diana and Emma, one will understand what I mean.

To the esoteric style is added complication of doctrine. Meredith is not only a poet and a novelist. Or, rather, he would not be a great poet and a great novelist if he did not have his philosophy, his morality, his system of art, and his interpretation of life. It is not we who invent them. He has taken care to expose them in detail, in special essays. There are few of his novels which do not contain a fragment of this interpretation, or in which its application to the problem of the book is not specifically

announced, set forth and detailed. Nothing is lacking, neither precept nor example. But it is all a little confused. And it seems still more complicated than life itself. Here again irreverence may seem gratuitous, or derogatory to the interpreter. In advance the interpreter yields to discredit and chastisement. He knows that one understands only what one deserves. But, in the judgment of a French mind, it really seems that Meredith, great friend of France that he was, has none the less retained from his German education something of the art of embroiling relatively simple ideas. Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, consciously or unconsciously inspired by the Positivist spirit, perceived God in man, the Creator in the creature. But the discrepancy between the incurable misery of the toiler and the omnipotence of the Creator left sentimentalists and intellectuals alike baffled and gloomy. There was a deal of pessimism in their realism. Meredith, going still further, began to rediscover the springs of hope and joy. He is a pantheist in the sense that he sees divinity not only in isolated, ephemeral creatures, but in all creation. Evil as they are, the world and life are nevertheless good enough for one to confide oneself to them without knowing too well why, simply because they are the world and life. We must seek rules and succour on earth, not in heaven among the angels; in living reality, not in the infirm spirit of mankind. Experience is superior to dogma, to all dogma, whether it be Christian or not. We are not concerned with replying to vain questions posed by our intelligence —this is a useful gymnastic, but pure gymnastic: our business is to work and serve. There is no certainty as to the meaning and object of life. That for George Eliot, and Renan is anticipated! But we have nothing

to gain and everything to lose by defying life. Here one feels the sting of pragmatism. The criterion is trial and effort, not success. And all utilitarianism, all determinism are forgotten. Such is the meaning of this cult of Mother Earth that he sometimes envelops in a few too many clouds. Such is the source of the joy and the optimism that is exhaled by Meredith's work. The doctrine is worth what it is worth. Its effect is indisputable. It is not an abdication of intelligence, a draft on instinct with default in view, and resignation for the only balm. Emotion, humour, sentiment have a place in it; but only a place. Meredith abhors the noisy gusts of laughter and the facile moisture of tears. His is an active doctrine, for men of courage and intelligence.

In France too, at this same time, we had a pantheistic school in art. And Meredith's great contemporary, Thomas Hardy, also practises the cult of the Universe. But he ends in passive despair because he eliminates the virtue of effort, the confidence in action, and faith in the solvency of the race and nature. Credit is given only the rich and successful. Meredith believed absolutely, joyously, in the victory of his universe and his species, provided each one did his task and won his fraction of the battle. In consequence many of Meredith's books are "ordeals," beginning with his first allegory, *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856), which shows, through a mass of fantasy and accessory pictures, the young reformer making his way toward the ideal despite reverses and disappointments. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859) is Meredith's first great book, one of his most finished, and one that may be counted among the very first novels of the century. Again it is the story

of a young man on the road of life, of an education that miscarries because it systematizes work and virtue, of a temperament that refuses to be mechanized. Enthusiasm alone leads to realization and inspires character. This demonstration, which spares nothing, verges on brutality. Meredith's contemporaries cried out at the unverisimilitude in the coarseness. This was the time when Flaubert was prosecuted for *Mme. Bovary.* We have seen more provocative stuff since. But in compensation, what poetry there is in the prose hymn of Chapter XIX, what intensity in the "last scene" in which Richard leaves his wife, what emotion in the regrets of Sir Austin, sitting by his dead fire, bewailing the son who has betrayed his hopes and broken his life! *Evan Harrington* (1861) and *Rhoda Fleming* (1865) present one the comedy and the other the tragedy of this same development of the human soul through circumstances; and the richness of thought and felicity of expression in the first of these two books would suffice to immortalize its author, even were there, behind this orgy of ideas and beauty, no system of art accompanied by a doctrine of morality and of life.

But, in his art, as in his thought, Meredith is lucid and organized. In twenty places he has himself elucidated the application of his doctrine to literature, with a rather laborious profusion, and nowhere more completely than in his *Essay on Comedy* (1897). M. Constantin Photiadès' book has, I believe, revealed this for the first time to the French public. For Meredith, the comic spirit, the sense of comedy, is the literary instrument *par excellence.* Without it, Mother Earth would remain for her children impenetrable and virtueless. To have the comic spirit is, before all else, to have the instinct, the thirst, the need for truth.

English humour, and French *esprit* are essentially a seizure of the real—that is to say, the individual. No types, no classes: nothing but persons. So much the better if the reader discovers in them a kinship. It is not the author's business. When one thinks that this artistic doctrine was being elaborated at the very moment when George Eliot and her school were filling the literary world with their generalizations and their categories, inspired by scientific classification and evolution, it is difficult to exaggerate the strength and originality of Meredith's genius. What virtue is not to be found in isolation by those who have the strength or taste for it? By isolation one avoids not only intellectual generalization, the mother of scientific clarity, and also of artistic frigidity and falsity, but one avoids its opposite as well—caricature, extreme specialization, exaggeration of the individual trait—and, too, false sentiment and cheap emotion that provoke a local and coarse excitation of sympathy and an arbitrary and artificial division of sensibility. Thus the noisy laughter and easy tears of Dickens, the blue and fragile flower of skin-deep sentiment that blooms even in Thackeray, all that is least good in their work (contemporary with Meredith, do not forget) finds itself gently but firmly eliminated from the novel as Meredith understood it. It is not laughter but the smile that is human, normal, artistic, revelatory; not the sob in the throat, but the moisture in the eyes. Save in catastrophes, every spasm is hysterical if it is natural. And if it is artificially provoked it is a mischievous thing or a laboratory experiment. No jot of thought or sentiment remains in the spasm. The laughter and emotion of truly human comedy remain lucid and admit of a criticism of life.

Certainly it is no novelty to say that art is expression, and, besides, the interpretation of reality. But, on the one hand, Meredith practised what he preached: to this his books bear witness, running over at once with humour, intelligence, and emotion. And, on the other hand, whatever the value of Meredith's doctrines, he had something more than doctrines. Even were they created, as is usual, merely to justify his practice, it does not matter. Even were they sterile, he is himself fertile. They did not create his art. Perhaps they even compromised it, toward the last, in tending to immobilize it. Such is the history of all theories which do not partake of the fluidity of change. They did not create his art, but they serve to explain it.

Let one attentively read over the excellent and full analysis of *Harry Richmond* (1871) in M. Photiadès' book on Meredith, and one will better understand the unity of his art and his doctrine. In *Beauchamp's Career* (1876) he has brought the same principles to the depiction of political life, and left far behind him the electioneering literature of Disraeli.

So for twenty years, from 1855 to 1875, Meredith projected the rays of his analysis into the most diverse regions of nature and human life. He had given examples and precepts of his art. Thereafter he was to apply it more specially to his own time, and, in his own time, particularly to woman, who is the creature *par excellence* of the novel, to marriage, to love, and to the problem of sex, the most immediate, the most passionate and most intense of all problems, and at the root of all others. It is useless to say that he showed himself to be more destructive than constructive (destruction is the proper function of criticism) and that by dint of application he ended by

exaggerating, fixing, and then enfeebling his formula as a writer, moralist and thinker. His style became more and more wire-drawn, more and more denuded of action and of atmosphere. Reality was eliminated; the novel concentrated on pure analysis and sometimes appeared—I ask pardon—suspended in the void. *The Egoist*, published in 1879, is perhaps Meredith's most characteristic work. It is a piercing satire on the Ego in all ages, but particularly in a utilitarian century. Sir Willoughby Patterne, Victorian in search of a woman, pitilessly reveals the satisfied, obtuse complaisance of his sex and of his epoch, pursuing the purity, beauty and devotion of woman as though they were his right. It is not astonishing that he is reduced to pleading for the very thing he has disdained, and to receiving, through weariness, resignation and scepticism, only the simulacrum of what he had thought to obtain as his due.

This critique of the masculine rôle, of the contemporary relations between the sexes, and this sympathetic, infinitely comprehensive and earnest analysis of the modern woman and the conditions of her life, are to be found in all of Meredith's later novels, published during the last twenty years of the century. They include an incomparable gallery of feminine portraits. In Meredith there are heroines for a whole century of fiction: Clara Middleton and Nesta, Renée and Cecilia, Carinthia Jane and Rosamund Culling. Nataly in *One of Our Conquerors* and Mrs. Warwick in *Diana of the Crossways* are among the most eternally seductive. It is in the depiction of women that Meredith best realized his precept of art and life, to know how to smile and love at the same time, "being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes," without loving them less, "and accepting the correction

their image of you proposes." The criterion of the man and of the "gentleman" is his attitude towards woman.

What a pity that the growing complication of his language and the marked absence of narrative and action should, if it did not alienate the contemporary ladies for whom his work did battle, at least postpone until the following generation the moment when even cultivated women might understand and appreciate him! But his profoundly intellectual work is destined to remain a repast for the lettered, and even—if the whole truth must be told—a feast for the men rather than the women of letters.

Meredith always used the word comedy in the original and etymological sense of a banquet, where the guests recline on couches; of a fête, with songs and lights. This must not be forgotten, for it is the key to his interpretation of the comic spirit, and the joy and optimism which he associates with it. But it is regrettable that, after a slow initiation, only the exquisites are admitted, and the crowd perforce excluded. In reading *One of Our Conquerors* (1891), for example, it is impossible not to be irritated by the quasi-perverse futility of style and by the plethora of obscurities. The austere philosophy of *The Amazing Marriage* (1895), the bloody satire on the holocaust in marriage, and the superb and patient humility of Carintha Jane, one of the most beautiful feminine figures of all time, suffer at first reading by being accessible only to the specialist.

It is not only by virtue of an apocryphal anecdote and the attraction of equivocal allusions to a society scandal that *Diana of the Crossways* was and remains—justly, if one may dare to say so in the face of a contrary feeling among many critics—more generally appreciated than Meredith's other novels. An additional reason is that its

subject admits of more action, and consequently of greater clarity. In this book the characters have a more terrestrial life.

However, there is no reason to believe that Meredith has been without social and literary influence. Far from it. The effect of a writer is sometimes in inverse ratio to his popularity. Witness Comte and Nietzsche. It is enough that their ideas filter and become diffused. For fifty years now, Meredith's ideas, indirectly disseminated, have been revolutionizing the art and the morality of England. He has done more than anyone else to undermine the Victorian colossus. To him women owe the better part of their newly won dignity and liberty. He would have shuddered at some of their conquests. No matter. In his hands the novel is even more different from the genre of Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot than theirs was from the original species as it was created in the eighteenth century.

It is not an artificial arrangement, but the symmetry ordained by circumstance and fact, that groups in pairs the great novelists of the nineteenth century: Dickens and Thackeray; Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot; George Meredith and Thomas Hardy. Each is simultaneously a coadjutor of the other, at once complement and antithesis.

Since Meredith's death, Mr. Thomas Hardy has been the greatest literary figure in contemporary England. But he ceased writing novels more than twenty years ago. During his lifetime he has been claimed by posterity. Prophet and recluse poet, he appears to the present generation in the clouds of his rustic Olympus.

No man ever lived closer to the land. His whole work, or rather all that counts of his work, is consecrated to the

men and the land of his native county of Dorsetshire, between Southampton and Plymouth. If one cut from Thomas Hardy's novels everything that serves to explain the characters—*milieu*, history, past, climate, and trade—there would still remain enough material to support, and enough atmosphere to encompass, certain of Meredith's aerial constructions. It is not supervenient to note in this connexion that Thomas Hardy was first of all an architect. He is perhaps the first English novelist who has known how to begin and finish, how to draw a plan and cleave to it. This is one of the reasons why he is assured of an enduring fame in France.

A poet like Meredith, he has, like him, lived all his life in the country. But he has made use of his isolation to penetrate his surroundings and to depict them. His heroes are shepherds, peasants, wood-cutters; not society folk like those of Meredith. He idealizes them no more—nor less—than Meredith stylicized the lords and ladies of his day. Neither the one nor the other leads us back to Arcady and the sheepfolds, save by spirit and intention. It is true that Thomas Hardy's rustics often speak like books, but it is in the proportion that literature has grown out of their language; not with the object and effect of making their language enter into literature. The archaism of their dialect is that of Chaucer, the Bible, and Shakespeare; a preserved, not an acquired perfume—the odour of mint, and thyme, and lavender. Moreover, his peasants are less his heroes than the country itself.

Thomas Hardy commenced writing about 1870, and it was several years before he found himself. *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) is an essay in agricultural realism; *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) is a tentative rural feuilleton. With *Far from the Madding Crowd*, in 1874,

he definitely entered his proper field, and there he met with success and popularity. *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) from the cycle of his great novels of country life.

In the meantime he published other novels that were less exclusively consecrated to the land and men of Dorset—*A Laodicean* (1881), for example. But his originality resides in his peasant books. To the eyes of a foreign reader it seems that he loses something of his power whenever he abandons the land.

Most certainly Thomas Hardy's men of the soil lack nothing of truth. He scarcely hides their vices and their crudities. He makes no plea for the purity or virtue of rural existence, and he abstains from preaching the return to the land, the religion of the simple life. But no more does he see the peasant as a simple brute. He has too much humour—that is to say, too much comprehension. Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Giles Winterbourne in *The Woodlanders* are worthy fellows without being weak, like Adam Bede, and they stick closer to the soil and to their trade than he. In Clym Yeobright and Marty South there is that rugose gentleness, that unconscious nobility, and—if one may so express it—that coarse purity of character which are universally the rural heritage. For them their fields and flocks are what they were for the ancients. The sowings and plantings, the harvests and market fairs, assume a character in the novels of Hardy, because in the eyes of his characters these events are what tournaments were to the knights of old, what the labours of Hercules were to the first men of the world.

Neither truth, then, nor humanity is lacking in these

peasants. They have humour and emotion too, after their fashion. Yet they are not the real heroes of the piece. Not from them comes that character of fatal grandeur by which the work is marked. The country over-reaches and absorbs the countrymen.

It is the land that explains and concentrates the interest. When Thomas Hardy turned away from it toward the end of his career—as in *Jude the Obscure* (1896) and *The Well-Beloved* (1897)—he lapsed into didacticism and the feuilleton. He no longer had anything to sustain him save a mournful and dead philosophy. He himself has said that the poetry of the peasant comes from the fact that in order to live he is constrained to the will of heaven, air and earth. In this identity of man's life and the life of the world Thomas Hardy satisfies the passion for fatalistic unity that is at the bottom of his spirit. The heath in *The Return of the Native*, the trees in *The Woodlanders*, the sheep and the farm in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, govern the lives of the characters with the accumulated, irresistible force of all heredity and all nature. The call of past generations and of the eternal open air sounds from his work to reach English hearts. A puissant concordance between all that is sensible inexorably binds man to things. Such is the stern divinity of Thomas Hardy.

This pantheism does not lead him to joy, as it did Meredith, but to the rigorous, vigorous, courageous acceptance of what is. There is no personal power in the Universe, no law, no moral sanction. The melancholy lesson of Tess is that the innocent are punished while the guilty escape. It is the same story as that of Hetty Sorrel. But the tone and the intention are at the opposite pole from George Eliot. Everything is consistent

in the work of Hardy. Here, toward the end of the nineteenth century, in the greatest novelist of his time, we see the result of the conflict between science and religion. Democracy and Christianity went bankrupt together. Faith in God and faith in man were stabbed to death. The world and life remained alone, still full of hope in Meredith, incapable of progress and devoid of virtue in the sombre grandeur of Thomas Hardy. Departing from the same unbelief, the one placed his trust in the Universe, the other ended in pantheistic nihilism. While awaiting either the justification of Meredith's optimism or the confirmation of Hardy's pessimism, literary youth took refuge in the *fin de siècle* spirit. Oscar Wilde and the decadents were in view. The twilight had come.

## CHAPTER III

## THE VICTORIAN AGE AND THE AGE OF EDWARD VII

### I

### *A Period of Transition*

The concordance of critical testimony establishes, in default of evidence, the considerable influence of French literature on the development of the contemporary English novel. It is true that Victoria reigned until the beginning of our century. But the court and the influence of the court had ceased, long before her death, to be preponderant and to give the tone, even to society.

Nineteenth-century England, absorbed by the most formidable development of wealth that the world had ever seen, scarcely had eyes for anything but herself. This was the period of conscience and organized insularity, in manners as in art. But even at home, by a conception of life that was German rather than British, England tended to forbid the contemplation, and consequently the representation, of everything that did not conform to the interest, the good name, the *religion*—in the broadest sense—of the race and of the State. Hence the real, although unconscious, hypocrisy of a part—the greater part—of her imaginative literature.

Nineteenth-century England was living and developing

apart. But she was looking at herself and picturing herself through the same mask that Germany was receiving, in this same century, from Prussia. If one can resign oneself to one of those simplifying generalizations that play midwife to truth even while they deform it, one may say that it was German influence that was then dominating, not life itself, but the intellectual and sentimental vision of that England which had been so frank and gallantly free in the most English periods of its existence.

Mr. Harold Williams tells us that in the nineteenth century Carlyle, the apostle of German literature, won a wider hearing and was more faithfully followed than Matthew Arnold, the partisan of Gallic and Latin genius —of which genius, let it be said, Arnold saw only the intellectual side.

Now without doubt there was much else in the nineteenth-century English literature besides this diffused Germanism, radiating from a half German court, that coloured, without even being able to express itself, manners and sentiments, form and fundament, in life as in the novel. There was much else, but this one influence was everywhere, or almost everywhere. And, without too much error, one may attribute to it the following frequent characteristics of nineteenth-century English books, even the best: the predominance of a moral point of view; regard for respectability; the union of fiction and edification; the divorce of the realities that are "beneficent" from those that are not; an abundance that was sometimes soggy; disregard of truth in itself and for itself; show-window sensibility, and *gemüthlichkeit* flowers in every exhibit. And all this, moreover, without detriment to a spiritual and moral life that attained strength

and a naïve grandeur by the sole virtue of its intensity. In these divers respects there was really a Victorian Age that ended about 1890.

And from that time until the war, which threw everything into confusion, there was really another age, a shorter and more troubled one, that for want of a better term I would call the Age of Edward VII. This age marked the beginning of the twentieth century as that of Anne, no less short and troubled, marked the beginning of the eighteenth.

This age was a reaction. But it was also a revolution, and one that proceeded from French influence. The war separates us so terribly from even the most recent past that we see it almost in the perspective of history. "The central decades of the last century," says Mr. Harold Williams,[1] "were almost wholly Teutonic in feeling and inspiration. . . . The group of young writers and artists who gathered about the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy* represents a seasoned and intellectual reaction in the direction of Celtic and French ideals." Now the novel in its totality is nothing else than a vision of life.

One of those invasive recurrences of French influence in manners of feeling and expression, that are almost always sequential to a revival of English Catholicism, made itself felt about the year 1890. England had little acquaintance with those advance-guard movements, those *Jeunes* reviews, and those fervent pleiads that play so great a part in all literary renovations in France.

But such a movement, as Mr. Williams indicates,

[1] *Modern English Writers,* 1918. Mr. Harold Williams, born at Tokio of English parents, and educated at Cambridge, is one of the best-endowed of the younger English critics. During the war he served in the French army. He has also published a study entitled *Two Centuries of the English Novel.*

grouped itself around the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*, which made their appearance at this time. It was then that Arthur Symons and George Moore in company with many others introduced into the novel—following Flaubert, Maupassant and Daudet—and into poetry—following Verlaine and the symbolists—that *mélange* of realism and impressionism that has permeated all of contemporary English literature.

From that time until the war, French influence produced the same revolutionary effects on manners and their depiction that had been experienced in the age of the Stuarts. In the novel dealing with love and society —that is, in the novel *par excellence*—it loosed a movement of revolt and crudity against the reserves, repressions and literary institutions of the preceding age. Nothing can be less formal, less conservative than contemporary English fiction. The audacity and brutality of language cannot, however, match the reigning speech of Wycherley's and Congreve's day. But this liberty of manner is in better accord with the multiple and disquiet thought of our age. It permits the expression of new or renovated ideas, never of forbidden coarseness. At the same time the audacity of the situations is scarcely less flagrant.

This liberty is accompanied by a fervour for demolition and reconstruction that is quite in keeping with the revolutionary years that Great Britain passed through at the opening of the twentieth century. It is not only geographic England, cultivated and fashionable England, ethnic England, that thus finds its countenance changed in the mirror of the novel: it is all England, even that of the common people, all Great Britain, and with her the entire world. For the sentiment of imperial

solidarity and the sentiment of social solidarity, sometimes united, sometimes opposed, develop together, after 1880, in reaction against collective and individual insularity. The Empire, far flung and united, is the whole universe. Society is all societies, good as well as bad, to say nothing of the worst. The costermonger comes into fashion. And so the whole world enters the novel, no longer seen from without, but pictured by and for itself, all races and all classes equally, all *milieux* included.

Meanwhile, Victorian commercialism does not desert its post. It penetrates further than ever into the production of the novel. English criticism, often vigorous, is never rigorous or exclusive; because, with the exception of special reviews, it must cater to the public taste and is at the service of success. Almost every book that appears seems to it worthy of attention. It does not clear the ground, as in France, by silence and preterition. The frantic competition among novelists for the prize of a clientele of two hundred million English-speaking British subjects, Americans, and Colonials; the incredible haste to which these authors are forced by agencies of simultaneous publication—whose rôle is becoming enormous—constantly lower, to the profit of copy-sellers, the barrier between art and trade, between letters and commerce.

Many novels, the best-known and the most famous even among the most cultivated people, would be in France nothing more than stuff for feuilletons and train literature. But they exist, and they exert an influence because they are rarely devoid of ideas, never without atmosphere, and because, when all is said, it is less impotence that they reveal than power that has abased itself.

Another consequence of this forced production is the rapid wearing out of reputations. Scarcely has a great English novelist charmed the Continent before he has ceased to be a power in England, for there other names already bewitch the crowd. During the thirty years in which I have been in close touch with English fiction, I have only twice—in the cases of Kipling and Wells (after having introduced them to the public)—seen an English novelist win real celebrity in France before exhausting his reputation in England.

Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy are the only contemporary English novelists who enjoy an incontestable fame in France. The first two, who won immediate success between 1890 and 1900, have ceased to exercise any perceptible influence on English public sentiment and taste. The last two, who began to write about 1900, seem to be exhausting their power and their activity. It is to names less well known in France that the favour of artists and the attention of the cultured will henceforward be given. We shall have occasion to mention them.

## II

## *The* fin de siècle *Novelists*

During the years between 1880 and 1890, which marked the twilight and close of the Victorian Age, the English novel was in a state of extreme confusion. On the one hand, the decadents and the æsthetes, disgusted by the eternal political and social controversies which for fifty years had furnished food for British fiction, stood aside in a sterile attitude of cynical, elegant, and falsely supe-

rior detachment. Oscar Wilde is the type. The formula "Art for Art" was valuable in so far as it was a protest against art for morality, art for religion, or art for amusement. But it was without positive virtue or significance, and it could not be applied to the novel without withering results.

The realists, the disciples of Zola—for example, Hubert Crackanthorpe, and George Moore in his earliest stage—tried in vain to acclimate in England the "slice of life," sordid life, that was suited neither to British taste nor temperament. Only two or three books that resulted from this movement survived the *succès de scandale* that greeted them.

The psychologists of the school of Paul Bourget and Henry James succeeded in making themselves not less unreadable than the realists, for there is no more vital virtue in mental or sentimental mechanism than there is in the mechanism of the purely material life.

Horrified and dismayed by all these wheels within wheels, certain authors like Harland and Symons, and later Hewlett, turned away toward an impressionism, a symbolism that had nothing in common with real life, and which consequently offered to fiction only an aliment of fantasy. Others resigned themselves to the disillusioned depiction of the miserable world in which they lived. George Gissing is the type of the hopeless.

It is not astonishing that public taste, first solicited and then captivated by the charm and high qualities of Stevenson, should recoil from this drabness in the direction of adventure fiction.

If sorrow and punishment had not wrenched from Oscar Wilde, toward the close of his life, one of the

most beautiful cries of eternal suffering, he would probably be already forgotten, even as a poet. It is not his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that would save his literary reputation. "I wrote it," said the incorrigible *poseur*, "in only a few days, because one of my friends pretended that I could not turn out a novel." The book made a stir because of the lascivious atmosphere that permeates it. But it is impossible to re-read it, without boredom, thirty years after. One does not even find in it that wealth of epigram that distinguishes Wilde's essays. It is a hasty wager barely saved by the colouring and verbal opulence of one or two chapters. There is no sincerity in this novel of the literary tribe. not one character who stands on his feet. The witty sallies of Lord Henry Wotton, so admired in 1891, do not seem even witty to-day. Dorian Gray justifies the first half of Oscar Wilde's statement that he kept his talent for his books and put his genius into his life. We know where that genius led him.

George Moore is a better representative of that mixture of mordant cynicism and æstheticism, of sordid realism and elegant impressionism that flourished in France and England during the next to the last decade of the nineteenth century. The faculty of refraction that this Irishman has displayed is one of the phenomena of our time. He has successively espoused all the literary modes that have run riot in his generation.

Born in 1853, he was at the age of thirty one of those disciples of Zola who helped to discredit realism by applying it only to the crudest emotions of mankind.

Under the title of *Lewis Seymour and Some Women*, he

has recently rewritten one of his very first books: *A Modern Lover* (1883). It would be instructive to compare these two versions of the same subject, written by the same man at periods thirty years apart, if only to disengage from the comparison the notion of indecency obtaining in the two different epochs. But these adventures of British *gigolos* do not lend themselves gracefully to a brief summary. The calm shamelessness of this young *Bel-Ami* who lets himself love for profit is equalled only by the unconsciousness of his *belles amies*, the one rather ripe, the other rather green.

A working-girl, a bourgeoise, and a patrician pass him back and forth without changing him. There is not the slightest development in the characters. The second version is marked by a perceptible aggravation of low comedy and libertinism.

*A Mummer's Wife*, published in 1884, has more vigour and strength. It is one of the masterpieces, and perhaps the masterpiece, of the realistic school in England. Nothing could be sadder or more poignant than this woman's life. The miserable room with its pharmacy smell, the exasperating cough of the sick husband, the resigned brutalization of the poor creature whom he has married and tired of; then the physiological and sentimental adventures of this unhappy woman, her insensate love for a travelling actor with whom she finally elopes; misery, drunkenness, the death of the baby strangled by convulsions while the mother sleeps off her gin—all this is marked by a sober truth and by a power voluntarily restrained, that are deservedly impressive. *Esther Waters*, which appeared ten years later, is another realistic novel which enjoyed a more brilliant success because

it depicts accurately the life of the race-track and the servants' quarters. But this book has not the psychological and literary value of *A Mummer's Wife.*

George Moore was already in the process of changing his model. Consciously or unconsciously he was under the influence of Paul Bourget and Henry James when he wrote *Evelyn Innes* (1898) and *Sister Teresa* (1901), the mental and sentimental stories of a magnificent creature, a cultivated woman, a great singer and a great artist, who becomes religious, loses her faith in the exercise of piety, but loses also her will and her initiative, and ends by closing once more upon her broken self the open door of the convent. And all this is extremely complicated.

After this, George Moore passed on to mysticism and symbolism, under the influence of the Irish poet W. B. Yeats. With Yeats, Moore took part in that Irish literary renascence which is one of the most interesting episodes in the intellectual history of our time. To this new work he brought the preoccupations of his preceding period, and treated practically the same subject (the conflict of nature with religion) with the same infinite digressions on art, nature, and everything under the sun.

In the short stories of *The Untilled Field* (1903), the priesthood and tradition unite in vain to stifle carnal love. In *The Lake* (1905), Father Oliver, an Irish curate, falls in love with Rose Leinster, the village schoolteacher, and finally abandons the Church without losing his faith. In this third part of George Moore's work, the aggressive outspokenness, the sordid realism, the exasperated and exasperating psychology of the earlier

periods, give place to a poetry that is mystical, intuitive and ornate while wishing to appear simple. But save for Moran, the Vicar frequently tempted by the bottle, not one of the secondary characters is alive. Rose writes too well. Father Oliver, a village curate, gives expression to a world of sensations and nuances that belong only to the most refined and cosmopolitan culture. As a result, this epistolary novel seems even more artificial than the genre necessarily is. As always with George Moore, one feels that all this is only literature. But there was no better literature in the Irish and English production of this period.

To-day George Moore is cast down, sometimes reviled in the chapels that he has traversed. It is said that he has had faith neither in his religion nor in his country. He has believed only in himself. He has loved only his art, women, and Bohemia. On his forehead is the brand of the cynicism he has so long affected.

Incapable of choosing a credo and impotent to live without one, disappointed and repudiated by Irish Celticism, which appears to him retrospective, provincial and without virtue, George Moore has finally bowed to his temperament of hedonistic intellectual, critic, and dilettante. It is in the rôle of literary gossip that he is truly himself, because he is always on the stage. Returning to poetic and generously coloured autobiography, to the cult of "I," revised and corrected, which had furnished him with *Confessions of a Young Man* in 1888, he has successively published *Memoirs of my Dead Life* (1906), and the trilogy *Hail and Farewell* which includes *Ave* (1911), *Salve* (1912), and *Vale* (1914). This is an anecdotal and highly seasoned history of the Irish

literary movement, in which the author attributes to his most famous compatriots, presented under their own names, conversations and adventures that are often imaginary.

These books do not lack savour for the initiated. They include some charming and living portraits, such as that of the excellent poet George Russell (A. E.). They are contemporary historical novels. The formula is new, strange, and bold. Here, as elsewhere, George Moore thinks like a concierge but writes like an artist. His work remains as the literary cinema of contemporary England and Ireland. With the same small bits of glass he has manufactured the most varied pictures of his time. He has the personality of a kaleidoscope.

While George Moore was importing the realism of Zola into England, Hubert Crackanthorpe, living in Paris, was promising to become one of the great writers of his generation. *Wreckage* is reminiscent of Maupassant. Nothing could be more sincere than these short stories; nothing could be sadder. In October, 1896, Crackanthorpe disappeared from his hotel. Two months later his body was pulled out of the Seine.

Two years before this, George Egerton (Mrs. Golding Bright) had published her best book: *Discords.* In 1900, Laurence Housman wrote *An Englishwoman's Love-Letters,* and George Egerton brought out an epistolary novel of the same kind but perhaps of superior quality. In 1895, Grant Allen entitled one of his first books *The Woman Who Did.* These were the precursors of the spirit of revolt that was to sweep away, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the last vestiges of the Victorian Age.

III

## *George Gissing*

Bentham's utilitarianism which reigned over the first half of the nineteenth century, and Darwin's evolutionism which reigned over the second half, were not religious movements but hypotheses. As all is in all, and religion at the base of all, there is no explanation of the world that does not affect it. The religious spirit easily defended itself against utilitarianism which was merely economic, or, at the most, philosophic or moral. On the contrary, it was really hard hit by the Darwinian hypothesis. To-day this hypothesis has lost its hold over the scientific world; but in George Eliot's time, between 1850 and 1880, many thinkers thought it was as firmly established as the laws of Newton, and the ignorant crowd felt that it had delivered a mortal blow to religion and perhaps to democracy. What use is there in the hypothesis of a creator, and a created, when the history of life can be explained by evolution? What use is there in striving for the greatest good for the greatest number when only the strongest and best-adapted should and can survive? In vain did Darwin's sincerest disciples, such as Huxley, expend their effort in proclaiming that evolution does not explain life nor the mystery of its origin—that is to say, Creation and Religion—and that no theory of natural survival is incompatible with the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. All this did not persuade the crowd that religion and democracy were not attacked by evolutionism. The great novelists of the late nineteenth century, Meredith and Hardy, escaped, in the

isolation of their lives and thought, the nihilism which resulted from this double condemnation.

Certain poets, such as James Thomson, author of *The City of Dreadful Night,* took refuge in a combative pessimism. The greatest, such as Rossetti and Morris, emigrated to æstheticism and pre-Raphaelitism. Others resigned themselves to a kind of universal bankruptcy.

In one unhappy and cultivated novelist, who was a true-born writer, the moral and mental sadness of this transitional epoch was added to the unhappiness of his temperament, his *milieu* and his life. The tardy, posthumous and growing fame of George Gissing is due to the sincerity of his work.

"Art, nowadays," wrote Gissing in *The Unclassed,* "must be the mouthpiece of misery, for misery is the keynote of modern life." But it was not sympathy for the unfortunate, nor revolt against misfortune, that dictated his books. He wrote them by necessity, to earn his bread, without love, without passion, and without hope. In his third novel, *Isabel Clarendon,* he wrote: "He who is giving these chapters of her history may not pretend to do much more than exhibit facts and draw at times justifiable inference."

The great realists, such as Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola, were sustained either by a keen artistic feeling, as were Flaubert and Maupassant, or by a keen social feeling, as was Zola; and an epic quality mingles with the brutality of the worst that they produced. In Gissing there is no brutality, no worst. His work is of a sombre, even melancholy. He challenges science and religion alike, and he expects nothing from fate, neither for his

fellow men nor for himself. He has sometimes been considered as the sympathetic historian of the working-classes. But he did little more than write the history of the suffering and rancour that poverty, from which he could not escape, long inflicted upon himself, whose temperament was that of an artist and man of letters. Almost his whole life was lived in London attics and garrets, in the company of inferior and despicable companions. Other men of his day were Bohemians by choice, by affectation, by instinct, and by profession. Gissing was the Bohemian by necessity; a miserable creature who deserved his misery, who knew it and suffered from the knowledge; and who, without holding the universe responsible, saw the world only in the terms of his life as a pariah, a proscript, and an exile.

The son of a chemist, equipped with an excellent classical education at Manchester, he cherished throughout his life the cult of antiquity. Intellectually he was formed to be a Walter Pater. Until his death he studied Greek prosody for pleasure. Morally, he was a Verlaine.

When he was only nineteen, a timid, solitary, sensual student, he was bewitched by a common creature, married her, stole a comrade's pocket-book for her sake, was caught, found guilty, and imprisoned. At twenty he was earning his living in the United States as a photographer, gas-fitter and reporter; then he returned to London by way of Germany and began to write novels for a livelihood. His wife became a drunkard and a prostitute (this situation appears frequently in English novels after Gissing: see notably Snaith's *The Sailor*). He did not always have food. The lavatory of the British museum was his dressing-room and his bath-room. He squandered a small legacy in the publication of his first novel,

*Workers in the Dawn*, and was saved from complete downfall only by Frederic Harrison, who procured him pupils and an introduction to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, edited by John Morley.

His first novels date from this period. Their subjects, tone and atmosphere are what one would expect. *The Unclassed* (1884) is the story of two young girls who escape the street by a miracle. *Demos* (1886) records patiently, sadly and at length the effect produced on a labour *milieu* by the socialist doctrines then new in England. *Thyrza* (1887) pictures a little English working-girl, slightly superior to her *milieu*, who is beset, debauched, and overwhelmed by the filth of the south London slums. More heart-rending still is *The Nether World* (1889), in which Gissing depicts with laborious realism the miserable life of Clerkenwell, another lugubrious quarter of the English capital.

These stories of the lower classes and the slums had then the interest of novelty. However, it was not until the publication of *New Grub Street*, in 1891, that Gissing finally attracted critical attention, by uncovering the wounds of the literary proletariate, the ways of success, and the trials of the writer.

Gissing was now at least assured of a livelihood, or rather of not starving. His two latest novels had each brought him in about a thousand dollars. But he plunged himself once more into misery. His first wife had just died. Incapable of bearing solitude and continence, there came a day when he threw himself at the head of the first woman he ran across, and married her. In vain his friends besought him to wait, to reflect. He himself has given us the reasons for his folly. Who but a poor wretch would marry a poor wretch? And as to

waiting, "they might just as reasonably have bidden him to reject plain food because a few years hence he would be able to purchase luxuries; he could not do without nourishment of some sort, and the time had come when he could not do without a wife." Two children were born to them. The household became unbearable; divorce was inevitable.

After 1892, Gissing's horizon broadened without brightening. With *Denzil Quarrier* (1892), he permitted himself an excursion into the middle-class world and the psychology of love. Lilian frees herself from an infamous marriage that family and law have forced upon her. But she cannot free herself from the consequent opprobrium, and she ends in suicide. Godwin Peak, the hero of *Born in Exile* (1892), is a child of the common people who wishes to escape from them; he falls in love with a cultivated woman, tries to persuade himself that he is a Christian and that he becomes a priest by vocation, not through ambition. But his nature is too false for conviction and too sincere for deceit. He lies and he is discovered. He dies as he was born, "in exile." There is something of Gissing in Godwin Peak, and much else besides. He inspires a rather contemptuous pity, but not antipathy. The analysis of this character is a *tour de force*, and perhaps Gissing's greatest success. But the artifice is obvious in his depiction of love. The author had no knowledge of women: he feared the harlot, and he pitied the poor intellectuals, without loving them. His *Odd Women* (1893) deals with the superfluous women, the women to whom life offers nothing but loneliness and poverty, unless they marry, as one of them does, for the sake of a home, only to be plunged, as she is, into despair.

Toward the end of his life Gissing married a French-

woman, lived in the Midi, and wrote that engaging autobiography, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft.* In this book he reveals with more abandon than rancour the sufferings of his artistic, cultured and epicurean nature, to which life denied the simple blessings of peace with his books, sufficient food, and a fire on his hearth.

This author who almost invariably wrote of sordid lives, is among the novelists who have brought the greatest culture to the modern novel. He has neither grace nor colour, sentiment nor humour. Like his heroes and his subjects, he is depressing. He might even be called a "sob sister." But he never exaggerates, which is a great originality. He thoroughly understood and justly criticized Dickens, whose methods were quite different from his own. There is no doubt that sincerity alone, in the novel as elsewhere, is durable. Gissing has never been popular, but he will long be read by those who value above everything, even their own pleasure, the honesty of work and the conscience of the workman.

George Gissing had little love for his age. Yet he did not aid in the break-up of contemporary opinion and convention that Samuel Butler was obscurely working toward. This latter writer, still unknown, although fertile in ideas and a powerful ironist, was silently developing two singular books in which the nineteenth century was to appear buried under its own rubbish.

## CHAPTER IV

### SAMUEL BUTLER AND HIS INFLUENCE

When Samuel Butler died at the age of sixty-seven, in 1902, he had never known great fame. Aside from a small group of scientists who had been stirred by his quarrel with Darwin and his ideas regarding evolution, few cultivated persons knew his name, still less his books. Now they are studied almost as classics. While an unparalleled catastrophe was convulsing the world for six years, the works of this unknown and misunderstood man were constantly printed and reprinted. Between October, 1915, and August, 1918, I count four *popular* editions of his old *Erewhon*, a Utopia that was first published in 1872. His novel, his one novel—*The Way of All Flesh*—begun thirty years before his death, and worked over for twelve years, was neither finished nor published when he died. It was necessary to reconstruct two or three chapters of which the manuscript was lost. Yet not a year has passed since 1908 without a new and large edition of this book, the reprinting of which was uninterrupted even during the war.

It should be noted that there is nothing timely, sensational, or popular in the work of Samuel Butler that would make an appeal to the preferences of the general public. It is addressed only to very cultivated persons. That is even one of its weaknesses. Butler's strength lies in the quality of his irony, the savour of his style, the vigour

and truth of his social observation; not in his characters, his narrative, or even in his ideas, although he was bursting with them.

Consider also that this writer was never, never wished to be, more than an amateur, a dilettante of literature, as of art and science. A painter, he had for years produced and exhibited without pretending to success. A musician, he spent his evenings, until the end of his life, composing gavottes and fugues in the style of Handel. A student who was an admirer and disciple of the evolutionists, he none the less launched a resounding polemic against Darwin, and on certain points completed and corrected his theories. Such a dispersion of mental power would have sufficed, without perversion, to lesson another man. But Samuel Butler had the art of transforming his tastes into crotchets, his fixed ideas and enthusiasms into hobbies, and his antipathies into resentments. He it is who has demonstrated that Handel was the greatest musician of all time; that the *Odyssey* was composed by a woman, probably Nausicaa; that Shakespeare's sonnets are the work of another man; and that the use of alcohol explains the superiority of human to animal intelligence. This is the man whom our day has revenged upon his own.

He foresaw and predicted this revenge. In advance, he counted upon at least seventy-five years of immortality after his death. This conviction was his strength. He was so sure of another life, anterior and posterior to his own, that he has compelled the world to recognize him in the detested ancestors of his flesh as well as in the posterity of his spirit. It must be admitted that few fates have been more original.

But this is not all. There was nothing imposing or

prophetic about Butler, despite his singularities. No one, and he less than any, considers his works as the fruit of an irresistible genius. This word seemed absurd to him. I hope I shall not offend those "Butlerites"—who still keep the fervour of neophytes—when I say that their great man was perhaps not even a very great mind. But most assuredly he was a character, and so strange a one as to seem improbable to us, and so vigorous that, like all men who have character, he has frequently been thought to have had a very bad one.

Son of a clergyman and grandson of an Anglican bishop, heir to a dynasty of educators and pastors, he delivered the most terrible blows against English family, education and ecclesiastical institutions. Were there not something equivocal about the epithet anti-clerical, it would be necessary to invent it for Butler. And if the epithet anti-family can be risked, no one ever courted, desired, and merited it more than he. Consciously and tirelessly he rubbed the gloss from domestic sentiment. Without bluster, but not without anger, he stripped and flagellated the family and the pious education of his day. There was nothing artificial in this attitude. It was the fruit of his experience, a part of his very being. For him experience was much more than a condition of literature. In his eyes there was no difference between impression and expression. Ideas are living things, they become part of the physical being and are transmitted by heredity and evolution; they express themselves in words, acts and writing without asking licence. His books are life, and his own life. In his novels there is nothing that is not explained by his biography.

How is it that such a life, such a man, and such a body of work have not yet tempted the writers who make it

their business to instruct France regarding contemporary England? [1] It will be said that it is a journalist's subject. As if everything alive, direct, and efficacious in literature were not journalism. Here I have neither the space nor the right to consider Butler as other than a novelist. While his novel is bound up with his scientific ideas, and even more closely with his polemics, his quarrels and his life, I can only touch on these divers subjects, hoping the while that I may be able to return to them elsewhere.

*The Way of All Flesh* is the story of three generations of Pontifexes, one of whom, the grandfather, is a publisher of pious books, while the other two, father and son, are clergymen. How the youngest, Ernest, is formed, or rather deformed, by his parents, his heredity and his education, the consequent catastrophes, and how he escapes and survives, physically and morally, is the subject of the book. Such, also, was the life of Samuel Butler.

His grandfather, Bishop of Lichfield, had for thirty-eight years been head master of Shrewsbury school (Roxborough, in the novel)—one of those great public schools in which the national life of old England was moulded. Samuel Butler himself spent six years there under a successor of his grandfather's. At the age of nineteen he went up to Cambridge. At twenty-three, like Ernest, he prepared himself to become pastor of a poor, workingmen's parish in London.

What circumstances led him to break with his family, his vocation, and his country? We know little about it. Later we shall see how Ernest was cast away. However it was, Samuel Butler, having quarrelled with his parents, left England in 1858, became a sheep-raiser in New

[1] Since this was written, M. Valery Larbaud and others have translated and reviewed Butler's books.

Zealand, and returned to London with a modest fortune at the age of thirty.

But he had done something in the antipodes besides making money. He had had occasion to look at the world through the other end of the telescope. To the free and simple life he had brought his piercing power of analysis and criticism, his incredible activity of thought and imagination—the taste for paradox as well, and pleasure and pride in reason. The young emigrant was everything he could be, except sentimental and lyric. All the forces of his nature and all the gifts of his mind were suddenly set in motion by the publication of *The Origin of Species* and the doctrine of evolution. For him as for all his generation this was a liberating shock. The two pamphlets that he published in New Zealand—*Darwin among the Machines* and *Lubricatio Ebria*—contain the germ of *Erewhon.*

Upon his return to London his fate was settled. He would be an arm-chair explorer of art, ideas and science. He began by losing a part of his competence in bad investments (cf. Pryer's speculations with Ernest's capital) and vainly made several trips to Canada to rehabilitate his fortunes. From 1876 to 1886 he fought against financial difficulties. At the same time he always had enough to live. His parents' legacy in 1886 gave him an excellent income. In the same way Ernest Pontifex was saved by his aunt's bequest. The money question is prominent in Butler's work as in Balzac's. Penury had aggravated his seclusion.

For thirty-seven years, from 1865 to 1902, Butler lived in modest quarters at Clifford's Inn, submitting himself to a semi-monastic discipline. His hours for rising and going to bed, the itinerary of his daily walk to the British

Museum, the number of cigarettes he smoked, the intervals between meals, were all rigorously fixed and observed.

In 1872, very much surprised at having made a book, he published *Erewhon*, which had sprouted in his hands like a mushroom. It is one of those Utopias that announce great renovations of the novel and society.

The book enjoyed some success. It was soon translated into Dutch, then into German. But Butler, with characteristic contrariness, refused to follow this road. He had other preoccupations which, in his opinion, were more serious: that of demonstrating, while mocking at it, the non-concordance of the resurrection stories—this was the object of *Fair Haven* (1873); and that of proving to the evolutionists that they were mistaken even while being right. Thus was born his trilogy, *Life and Habit* (1877), *Evolution Old and New* (1879), *Unconscious Memory* (1880).

By this trilogy he made sure of having faithful enemies in both the religious and scientific camps of English thought.

In 1870 he had met Eliza Mary Ann Savage. It is easy to divine what his sentiments for her were, when one knows that he painted her in his novel under the features of Alethea, the beneficent and clairvoyant fairy, the creature of sweetness, intelligence, and grace, who saves Ernest Pontifex from his family, from himself, and from misery. But Butler was not to marry Miss Savage. She died in 1885. Thereafter the story of his life is scarcely more than the record of his ideas and his crotchets, punctuated by frequent trips to Italy. The lakes and the Alps were the true country of his soul. To them he has consecrated one of the best among his books: *Alps and Sanctuaries*

*of Piedmont.* He also left copious notes which contain his most personal writing. But we are examining him here only as a writer of fiction.

*Erewhon* differs from the majority of Utopias in that it does not present a better country and a model society, but the reversed or deformed image of the author's own country, of his own world. Neither the pessimistic violence of Swift nor the optimism of More, nor the tendency of their imitators toward exhortation and the future, enters into the humour of Samuel Butler. It is so completely objective that at times one does not know, and he did not know himself, whether it was compacted of more sympathy than irony, or of more irony than sympathy. He at once mocks at the old world and at his new world, because in both of them there is good and evil, false and true. Often the smile of Butler remains enigmatic. His muse is a Joconde who thinks. So do not reproach him for his inconsistencies.

"I am aware," writes he, "that there are not a few. . . . The blame, however, lies chiefly with the Erewhonians themselves, for they were really a very difficult people to understand. The most glaring anomalies seemed to afford them no intellectual inconvenience; neither, provided they did not actually see the money dropping out of their pockets, nor suffer immediate physical pain, would they listen to any arguments as to the waste of money and happiness which their folly caused them. But this had an effect of which I have little reason to complain, for I was allowed almost to call them lifelong self-deceivers to their faces, and they said it was quite true, but that it did not matter."

The foreign reader, then, must approach Butler with precaution. In many places nothing, save the least

quiver, betrays his irony. He possessed the same power of mystification as did Defoe, and sometimes achieved the same result of causing himself to be taken seriously by the very persons he was mocking. Zeal for truth and zeal for virtue are his *bêtes noires*. He discerns in them the origin of lying and vice in those who are culpable of them, and of dissimulation and insincerity in those who tolerate them. His irony is double-edged. It strikes at once at subject and object. It is the most consoling and the most radical of iconoclasms. He holds up to the world a mirror that is sometimes concave, sometimes convex. Then irony reveals itself by the reversal of figures or the exaggeration of contours. On occasion the mirror is flat or very slightly incurved. Then one must look at it twice, for the image differs from the original only by an inversion of lines, the right being on the left. It is a bad sign in a man, observes Butler, if he cannot bear to have the picture of his life inverted in a mirror, after the fashion of painters who wish to judge the effect. The flat glass dominates in *The Way of All Flesh*. *Erewhon* combines the three mirrors. Here is an analysis of the latter book:

Mr. Higgs, a young New Zealand colonial, after a minutely described journey, discovers the country of the Erewhonians, "over the range." Alone he clears the circle of Polynesian statues whose mouths are so fashioned that the wind makes them utter eternal music (here Butler cites some chords of Handel). The Erewhonians are afraid of machines. The adventurer's watch is confiscated, and he is imprisoned. The jailer's daughter teaches him the language and the customs of the country. Sickness, ill fortune and poverty are the crimes most severely punished in this land. The colonial's life is spared because of his

muscular arms, his good complexion, and his blond hair. The Queen causes a pension to be assigned him so that he may not have to suffer chastisement for his poverty. On the other hand, the Erewhonians look upon crime as a curable illness.

Mr. Higgs is present at a number of trials. A man is condemned for having lost the woman whom he loved. It must be recognized "as an axiom of morality," states the judge, "that luck is the only fit object of human veneration." A youth has allowed himself to be swindled out of his fortune. He too is condemned. No one has a right to bad fortune. It is an evil example. For a pulmonary consumptive the sentence is forced labour and castor oil. "You may say that it is not your fault. . . . I answer that whether your being in a consumption is your fault or no, it is a fault in you, and it is my duty to see that against such faults as this the commonwealth shall be protected. You may say that it is your misfortune to be criminal; I answer that it is your crime to be unfortunate."

Birth is concealed with care. It is a cause for shame. Death is proclaimed. Friends of the dead man send to his family little boxes of artificial tears which "vary in number from two to fifteen or sixteen, according to degree of intimacy of relationship."

Mr. Higgs becomes the guest of a prominent citizen who has suffered from "a severe attack of embezzlement," but who has been completely cured, thanks to the "moral straighteners," physicians of the soul. His daughter Arowhena is charming. At the end of the book Mr. Higgs carries her off in a balloon.

But we anticipate. About half-way through the book we come to the end of that graphic and descriptive por-

tion in which Butler rivals Defoe. Now comes the study of institutions, the analysis of beliefs, and the quality of the irony recalls Swift.

The opinions of the Erewhonians are at once uncertain and rigorous; they believe and do not believe in their beliefs. They do not know exactly what they think. All that they know is that one must be sick not to think as they do. For example, Erewhon enjoys a double fiduciary system. No one accepts the "Musical Banks" money in payment, but everyone desires it, and those who discredit it are disgraced. Trait for trait, these "Musical Banks" resemble the British cathedrals, the principal establishment resembling Westminster; their cashiers, their functionaries are uncomfortable, embarrassing, unhappy. They are in a false position from which they cannot escape. They are "clergymen."

The principal goddess is Ydgrun (Mrs. Grundy). She is omnipresent, omnipotent, cruel and absurd, scarcely acknowledged by her worshippers; yet her cult is salutary. Her most zealous adorers are the salt of the earth. Sometimes, but rarely, they are courageous enough to offend her. She never revenges herself, for they are brave and she is not. They are "gentlemen."

The Colleges of Unreason resemble the Universities, feature for feature. The chief subject of study is the "hypothetical" language, a dead language which is looked upon as universally useful because it is of no particular use. The object of education is to think as one's neighbours do. Reason leads to extremes. "Extremes are alone logical, but they are always absurd. . . ." Hence the necessity of teaching unreason. "Without it, reason itself were non-existent: it is the essential portion of truth."

The independent pre-existence of beings governs the family. The unborn come into the world of their own free will, on their own initiative, despite winds and tides. They torment the poor innocent parents into procreation. On arriving they sign a formula in which they declare themselves responsible (baptism) and another (confirmation) in which they renew their declaration of original sin. On them rests the whole responsibility. Thus the egotism and prudery of the progenitors are assuaged. If the descendants are unhappy and cause unhappiness, it is their own fault, and Nature's as well. A chicken is only the means by which an egg may produce another egg. The born is the prey of the unborn. The one devours: it is its function. The other resists and revenges itself. Every family is a justing-field.

After this satire on the social cell, Butler proceeds to examine the rights of animals and vegetables. He rounds off his book with an evolutionist dissertation on machines, which is a pure *hors-d'œuvre.*

I have said enough to show the scope of this book. English laws, justice, manners, religion, family, education —nothing is left standing. It is true that here and there Butler makes certain reservations. Is this prudence or scruple? In any case, the reservations are not what remain in the memory. A direct style that is always urbane, an irony which cuts noiselessly to the roots; no epithets, no eloquence, no big words: that is *Erewhon.* In it there are neither characters, nor emotion, nor plot. The lack of order is flagrant. The inconsistencies are blinding. The work of an amateur, *Erewhon* belongs to no genre and serves no party. It is not a masterpiece, not a tool.

It was a ferment.[1] If truth were told, a portion of the philosophy and literature in contemporary England, and even elsewhere, should be labeled: "After Butler."

"I am," he says somewhere, "the *enfant terrible* of literature and science." In *The Way of All Flesh* he returns to the charge (and this time it is a novel) against all the malpractices of religion and family. But, along the road, he has encountered those of science. An admirer and disciple of Darwin, he perceives behind the doctrine of evolution the growth of dogmas as detestable as those of the Church. Butler goes forth to war against the purely mechanistic conception of the world that is establishing itself, and he advocates a vitalism founded on instinct, that is to say on faith, and on memory, that is to say on tradition. This is one of the objects of his scientific work between 1877 and 1881.

Nor did the novel which he composed between 1872 and 1885, with the aid of Miss Savage, spare the science and religion of his day any more than it spared the Church and the family. As it was impossible to publish so completely autobiographical a book during his lifetime, he abandoned it in 1885, after the death of Miss Savage.

Such a monument does not lend itself to miniature. Such a book yields ill to summary. It contains four characters who are almost entirely new in the history of English fiction: Theobald Pontifex, Ernest's father; Christina, his mother; Ernest himself; and Mrs. Jupp, widow of a cabman, and a London lodging-house keeper.

Theobald has been crushed by paternal and clerical

[1] At the end of his life Butler returned to the same subject in *Erewhon Revisited*. It is a better-made book, but in it one finds the worst of imitations, that of self.

education. In turn he attempts to crush his son. The insincerity of clerical and family life, its cruelty under the cloaks of love and conscience, the convergent forces of heredity, money, *milieu* and education, could easily have got the better of Ernest. He is saved by his Aunt Alethea who represents human grace, the indulgent and clairvoyant goodness of the true woman—by his friend Mr. Overton, Theobald's old friend and Ernest's godfather, who is supposed to recount his life and be the author of the book—and, above all, by his unconscious self, which revolts against the conscious, reveals itself in him, dictates his action, and redeems him after having seemed to ruin him.

Ignorant of the world and of his own nature, the victim of a blind education, deprived of his beliefs and of his money at the first contact with life, the young Levite tries to take by force the first woman whom he meets. He is arrested, condemned, imprisoned. His downfall frees him from his family and his profession. He discovers the limitations of conscience and of truth.

After this he commits foolish and generous mistakes, marries a prostitute, is freed of her. He ends by taking refuge in the cult of the golden mean, the life of the "gentleman," and, saved from poverty by his aunt's fortune, he sets himself up in critical, active solitude, without success, but without regrets. In short, Samuel Butler.

Christina and Mrs. Jupp are real "finds." The run-to-seed daughter of a clergyman burdened by his family, Christina plays cards with her sisters to see who will have Theobald. She wins. After the marriage, it is she who is not won but swept away, absorbed by Theobald. She escapes through imagination, becomes one of those An-

glican mothers, vain of virtue, who glory in, and wear themselves out with, castles in Spain and castles in Paradise, unintentionally tormenting their children with scruples and mysteries. Yet all this is done with so charming a candour that Christina is never odious, and never ceases to be interesting.

Mrs. Jupp, "body of an old trollop with the soul of a young one," exults in vice as Christina does in virtue. "I can't make out what the young men are a-coming to . . . ," says she, "when many an honest girl has to go home night after night without so much as a fourpenny bit . . ." And again: "I do hate a wet Saturday night —poor women with their nice white stockings and their living to get. . . ." In her old age "she gives us to understand that she is still much solicited," but "She has not allowed even Joe King so much as to put his lips to hers this ten years."

The image of the family which is left by this book may be summed up in the words of Mr. Overton: "The greater part of every family is always odious; if there are one or two good ones in a very large family, it is as much as can be expected." Or in these of Ernest: "There are orphanages for children who have lost their parents—oh! why, why, why, are there no harbours of refuge for grown men who have not yet lost them?" And in another place: "A man first quarrels with his father about three-quarters of a year before he is born. It is then that he insists on setting up a separate establishment; when this has been once agreed to, the more complete the separation for ever after, the better for both."

After these dagger thrusts, of what importance are Butler's reservations and explanations? The harm is done. After he has said of religion and science almost

what he has said of the family, what does it matter that he reconciles them in the cult of the "gentleman"?

"As the days went slowly by he came to see that Christianity and the denial of Christianity after all met as much as any other extremes do; it was a fight about names—not about things; practically the Church of Rome, the Church of England, and the free-thinker have the same ideal standard and meet in the gentleman; *for he is the most perfect saint who is the most perfect gentleman.* Then he saw also that it matters little what profession, whether of religion or irreligion, a man may make, provided only he follows it out with charitable inconsistency, and without insisting on it to the bitter end. It is in the uncompromisingness with which dogma is held and not in the dogma or want of dogma that the danger lies . . . extremes are alone logical, and they are always absurb. . . ."

All this is fine and good. Thackeray, too, sculptured the modern saint with the features of the perfect gentleman. But he had not begun by knocking down everything, family and religion, which serves to support the perfect gentleman. The author of *The Book of Snobs*, the critic of social snobbery, had himself ended in moral snobbishness. But he was too prudent or too sceptical to admit that this was a makeshift. Butler, who by the way hated Thackeray, demonstrated, or thought that he had demonstrated, that neither the reason, nor the faith, nor the family of his day could serve as foundation for the moral life. He left nothing of them but a balance, a residue. What could stand upright on these fragments? His work is negative, despite its positive conclusions. It is a clearing away of English Victorian rubbish.

So from the moral point of view, Butler, despite his philosophic pretensions, has created nothing. As regarded literature he was devoid of pretensions. But he was not without virtue or without influence. He forbade himself a style, and in truth he sought nothing but to express himself as clearly and as efficaciously as possible. That is how he became a writer. He was perfectly sincere, even in his crotchets. That is why his humour and his irony, even when unjust, ring true. He was incapable of seeking an effect of situation, of exploiting a dramatic conjuncture. He recognizes all the *scènes à faire*, and he indicates them; but he does not create them. There are many digressions and not a single "purple patch" in his vast novel. It is perhaps for this reason that the total effect is so powerful. He does not know where to stop. Either *Erewhon* or *The Way of all Flesh* might end with its first half. But the rest is not less important, for the rest is Butler, that is to say what is best in Butler's books.

Why devote so much space to him, and so little to others, in so short a book? Because we are concerned here with the present, with the contemporary novel, with the living generation in England, and because literary youth, between 1905 and 1915, has fed on Butler. He has said that the History of Art is a history of resurrections. And this devil of a fellow has proved his statement. His looks were not his fortune, with his big skull, his long face, his thick lips, and his heavy brows. But I have never seen a head in which the Celt and the Saxon were superposed to better effect. It is evident in his books. Who reads, who will read, the novels of learned and distinguished ladies whose works claim to give us

a picture of contemporary England? In all probability, Samuel Butler, amateur novelist, will survive many a professional of his age.

The danger of excess, even in virtue, and of zeal, even for good; the denunciation of poverty as though it were a vice, and of wealth as though it were folly; the apology for the golden mean by the reciprocal destruction of contraries; criticism of domestic tyranny; the presentation of woman as the aggressive element in the battle of the sexes; the depressing influence of duty without pleasure in education as in life; the active value of pleasure, with or without duty, as the motive of existence; truth, the synonym of goodness, but goodness more obligatory and truer than truth when they are in conflict—these are the theses which Bernard Shaw, for some fifteen years, has been borrowing almost literally from Samuel Butler. He might also have found them in the old moralists of the Jesuit order, had he suspected their origin; but he did not.

With the extravagant lighting effects of the theatre, he has dragged on to the stage these old ideas, rejuvenated, painted, grimacing. Samuel Butler sincerely believed that he had discovered them. And indeed he slowly elaborated them, without perhaps knowing that they came to him from a facetious Roundhead. In him they had more naturalness and dignity, because they moved through note-books, in the shadow of libraries, suitable to their age and their equivocal features. Bernard Shaw has treated them as the Salvation Army treats religious sentiments: a big drum, uniforms, electric light. He has obtained his desired result—namely: to attract attention. But it is time to give Samuel Butler the

share, the principal share, which is his in this resurrection of anti-Puritanism and anti-Jansenism under the entangled forms of moral paradox and scientific truth. By a singular freak of fortune there have been two Samuel Butlers in English literary history and both have made game of the bigot. The same name, the same first name. The burlesque poet of the seventeenth century, author of *Hudibras*, dealt no more tenderly with religious pedants than did the author of *Erewhon*. But neither the one nor the other struck at the pedant in honour, in moral good taste, in social good form. On the contrary, each of them readily opposed the Gentleman to the bigot. It is Galsworthy—and after him a whole school of young novelists—who has set out to find *the man behind the gentleman.*

Since Samuel Butler, evolution and heredity have become really living and moving forces in English literature; they are no longer "problems," subjects for study, but the flesh and spirit of contemporary fiction. One no longer discusses them; one is not astonished by them; one finds them not at all disturbing. They inspire and dominate. Bernard Shaw is hardly a novelist, scarcely more is he a playwright. The bulk of his work is journalism. He abounds in paradoxes, and many of his paradoxes serve no better purpose than to popularize the ideas of Samuel Butler. He has recognized, proclaimed the fact. There is no reason to doubt it. His prefaces offer sufficient evidence, notably the preface to *Fathers and Children.*

But the effects of evolution and heredity cannot be measured in a crisis, in a dramatic work. A life is required, many lives, to appreciate them. So novels dealing with two or three generations have become a frequent

form of fiction. *The Way of All Flesh* shares with *Jean Christophe* the responsibility for a host of interesting works in which ancestors, environment, and racial influence play a preponderant rôle.

Gilbert Cannan, who by the way has written a very interesting and remarkable critical study of Samuel Butler, manifestly submits to his influence as a novelist in *Little Brother* and *Round the Corner*. His revolt against the conventions and insincerities of English life is even more complete and more radical. Samuel Butler with all his temerity of thought was singularly timid in expression. It was not for nothing that he finished by adopting the ideal of the perfect Gentleman. Gilbert Cannan has less erudition and more temperament, more frankness. He knows that love and self-interest play a rôle that is more immediate, more material, more brutal and more physical than Butler dared to say or even to indicate. One of his novels, *Mendel*, combined a solidity of base with a sincerity of expression that augured great things. But unhappily Gilbert Cannan shares in the fault of his compatriots: he gives evidence of a deplorable fecundity. He is one of those novelists who know neither how to begin nor to finish. His *Mendel* is interminable. I prefer *Pink Roses*, less ambitious, but all in all more human, more interesting.

It is not a novel for young girls. No more is *Mendel*. Carnal adventure occupies the most prominent place in this story of a prostitute and an intelligent simpleton. But there are ideas behind the tale. It is permissible to expect a good deal from Gilbert Cannan.

## CHAPTER V

## HENRY JAMES AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL

The principal work of Henry James, chief and master of the psychological novelists in England, belongs to the period between 1880 and 1890.

I shall not rewrite his biography here. It is known in France, thanks to excellent works. The son of a famous theologian, the brother of a celebrated philosopher, he was dedicated to literature from his infancy, which was caressed by Thackeray. It has been said that William James made the study of metaphysics easy, and that Henry James made the study of the novel difficult. The quip is not devoid of truth. But it would be more accurate to say that William spent his life in substituting the concrete for the abstract, experience for explanation, while Henry was persisting in explaining the concrete by the abstract, life by mechanism.

In his youth Henry James undertook the task of his life, which was that of many Americans of both sexes: to conquer European society, to penetrate it and be penetrated by it, to inscribe oneself on it and to describe it. It is a harsh task. Many rich and beautiful women have consecrated health and fortune to it. Henry James resembles them in certain respects; but his conquest was of the invisible order. It was the wealth and equilibrium of his inner being that he risked. One must, in truth, be

exceedingly intelligent to succeed in this denationalization without falling either into snobbery or mania. Henry James was abundantly possessed of the culture (and the heart) which enables one to sustain the moral expenses of cosmopolitanism.

When, toward the end of his life, having won freedom of the city in France and in England, he became a citizen of the country of his fathers at the moment when that country was running the greatest peril and making the greatest sacrifice in its history, it was a long time since anyone had doubted the sincerity of his vocation. He was already a bourgeois of cultivated Europe—a *bourgeois gentilhomme* in many respects—but a confirmed bourgeois.

Along the way, he had described in fifty volumes of stories and essays the adaptation, then the adoption of that portion of intelligent America which casts anchor on the shores of its origin. From the very beginning, considering only its superficial aspects, one perceives how interesting, how exceptional was this writer's career. A reversed Christopher Columbus, he discovered western Europe. What he discovered in it was almost exclusively Society with a capital S. And in Society itself he depicted scarcely more than refinements of intelligence and complications of sentiment, and this with an infinite luxury.

When, by chance, he chooses persons from the middle classes, he regards them with a worldly eye—very closely, for he is myopic, and through his monocle. If he describes children, it is with minute fidelity. But their point of view is that of the *milieu*, of the exceptional world in which they live. In short, Henry James was a specialist in the elegant, cultivated, cosmopolitan life.

His first books, published between 1870 and 1880, bear no resemblance whatsoever to those of his maturity. The theme of most of them is the social encounter of the New World and the Old, across the barrier of prejudice, tradition and reciprocal ignorance. *Roderick Hudson* (1875), *The American* (1877), *Daisy Miller* (1878), *An International Episode* (1879), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) are all more or less concerned with this difficult penetration. The style is relatively simple and direct, although abundant. The narrative unrolls itself slowly, but without hesitation, without pause. The characters are presented without intermediaries. They are seen not in a mirror, but as through a pure crystal. The character analysis is skilful; yet at the same time it does not lose itself in subtleties. The *Aspern Papers* (1888) is the masterpiece of this first period. If he had stopped writing about 1890, Henry James would be regarded to-day as a classic. It would be said of him: "He was a distinguished and sometimes excellent writer, gifted with a rare penetration. His last books gave evidence of a tendency toward psychological twaddle."

At this period Henry James, who had been writing for more than twenty years, was in the process of changing his manner, of creating a system for himself. It caused him to gain greatly in influence during the remainder of his life; but there is no assurance that posterity will thank him for it. *The Bostonians* (1886) and *The Tragic Muse* (1890) are transitional works in which that maniacal prolixity, that superabundance of analysis which mark the second period, begin to become insupportable.

Indeed, Henry James is no longer content to tell a long story at great length. It is necessary, too, that

it should seem to emanate not from the author, but from the characters. It is necessary that everything should be arranged, conceived and written as though the characters were revealing themselves, or each being revealed by the others, and creating their own atmosphere. *What Maisie Knew* (1898), for example, relates the awakening of the moral sense in a child who grows up in a rather shady *milieu*. We learn nothing of this *milieu* save what the child knows and guesses of it. And we learn this very slowly, by fragments, by flashes, with infinite detours and retracing of steps. We see *Maisie* and her family only through her, and as she does.

That is what Henry James called "realizing the point of view." There will be no events, or as few as possible, in books so conceived. It is not the events which matter, but only their causes or their reactions on the souls of the characters. Direct recital by the author would simplify and abridge this skilful and complicated arrangement. But this would be sacrilege. Complicated mirrors, narratives at third hand, conversations apparently devoid of object, are interposed between the reader and the subject. The novel becomes a succession, an arrangement of refractions. One can surmise into what verbal debauch, what prodigality of analysis, such a conception leads. So the manner of Henry James becomes unbelievably prolix. *The Awkward Age* (1899), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1905), *The Finer Grain* (1910), and *The Outcry* (1911) belong to this second cycle. Certain of these novels, *The Ambassadors*, for example, which Henry James considered the best of his books, include treasures of observation. They are built and scaffolded with the solidity of a scientific work. In them the unity

of conception and style is absolute. They are perfect specimens of the clock-maker's art, exhibition pieces. But what a price must be paid for this museumlike perfection!

Henry James' psychology is exercised and his system is applied at the expense of life. He takes down and explains, gear by gear, the mechanism of his characters. Analysis becomes an end in itself. The very sense of living reality withdraws from these *constructions*, which end by being no more than a learned, methodical *destruction*, in the midst of a tide of words. The clock-maker stops the clock, and pretends that by displaying its wheels he can make it reveal its movement. The surgeon dissects his creation, his child, in the hope that it is going to show how it lived, why it suffered. Then, when it has died under the chloroform, he seeks another victim. Daisy Miller expires in four lines, "and the description of her parasol occupies more space than the outcome of her illness" (W. L. Phelps). It is superfluous to say that with such a method the author attains neither nature nor the natural. His psychology, apparently profound and learned, is in reality superficial, almost puerile, since it makes nothing felt while attempting to explain all. It is not that Henry James himself did not experience the thrills of life; but he is impotent to communicate them.

It may be said that it is vain to reproach an author with not being what he is not, with not having done what he neither knew how nor wished to do. Henry James' models were not simple. It is their distinction that they are "distinguished," and consequently subtle. To paint them is inevitably to explain them, to take them apart. Why seek nature and the natural where they do not exist?

Intensity of analysis is their condition, their *raison d'être*, so far as they are literary creatures. This forced analysis does not touch life? Very well. But it has an absolute value, a necessary and sufficient interest, it justifies itself and by itself, for the reason that the characters exist only in it and by it. It is at once the subject and the object of the novel.

My reply is that we are concerned here with neither condemning nor approving the doctrine and practice of Henry James, but only with showing its result. It is not lacking in interest. What is there in the world that is not interesting, provided one knows how to study it, wishes to understand it? But, if the second portion of Henry James' work is an excellent subject for study, it offers us no interpretation, no revelation of life.

Forever in pursuit of the exact nuance that he never succeeded in seizing, and of the expressive word that he encountered rarely, Henry James, in the second half of his career, ended by falling into an unprecedented verbosity. Ideas are hidden under successive cloaks, no one of which is either right or definitive. Instead of tossing them aside, the author exhibits them, one after the other, detailing each garment, each cut, all alike and all different. Here is the house of the hundred thousand greatcoats. Frankly, Henry James is unreadable, save for the pundits, the specialists.

His vain pursuit of expression, his verbal incontinence, his mania for establishing the position of the commonest words by the use of italics, by quotation marks, in order to emphasize the fact that he uses them sometimes in their usual but faulty acceptation, sometimes in a sense that is peculiar to himself, but extraordinary—all this belongs to mental pathology.

How can his incontestable influence be explained? He was little read, but he had a system and he believed in it. Auguste Comte and Karl Marx had scarcely more readers. The action which an author exercises is often in inverse ratio to his limpidity, to his immediate success. Henry James became chief of a school. He was a veritable intellectual power. His last oracle on the novel, in 1914, was received with reverence. In Joseph Conrad, for example, in Galsworthy, and in all the younger school, one will find the application of certain of his principles: indirect narrative, predominance of the "point of view." The secret of the prestige which he enjoyed must be sought in his character at least as much as in his doctrine and his practice. This worldly novelist was profoundly sincere and candid. His was the faith, the cult of intelligence. No adventures, he wrote in *The Sacred Fount*, are more moving than intellectual adventures.

He never courted, he often affronted public taste. He was the first to smile at his publishing reverses, the first to recognize the exiguity of his public. He proclaimed himself a disciple of Turgenieff, and naïvely explained that Turgenieff was unable to read him:

"He cared, more than anything else, for the air of reality, and my reality was not to the purpose. I do not think my stories struck him as quite meat for men. The manner was more apparent than the matter; they were too *tarabiscotées*, as I once heard him say of the style of a book. . . ."

Such frankness and such courage bring their recompense. The influence of Henry James was as much moral as intellectual, as much that of a man as that of a man of letters.

Let us add that he took great care to move with his

time, even to keep in advance of youth. The whole first portion of his work deals with the social conflict between the New World and the Old. Almost all of the second part is consecrated to the conflict between the Victorian generation, sure of itself, complaisantly established in well-being and good tone, and the generation of Edward VII, disquiet, troubled and troubling, which claimed the right of testing all things. That is how Henry James, even in his old age, remained in touch with the younger novelists. He was attentive to intellectual fashions, and he preferred preceding them to being forced to follow them.

Those poor Victorians! For thirty years they have been constantly assailed: first by Meredith, Henry James, Samuel Butler, Bernard Shaw, Kipling, Wells; later by Bennett, Galsworthy, May Sinclair; then later still by the "younger generation" that is working and producing under our eyes—Beresford and Walpole, Gilbert Cannan and Compton Mackenzie, Oliver Onions and Frank Swinnerton. One begins to defend these poor Victorians, seeing them thus hunted down. Mahogany, plush, moleskin and velvet, round tables, oval tables, mantillas, mittens, cashmere, white stockings, nankeen, foot-straps—all these will undoubtedly become fashionable again. And our little nephews will be astonished at the acrimony with which this desuete world was cried down and jeered at by our generation in the early years of the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER VI

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL DURING THE PAST THIRTY YEARS

### I

### *New Tendencies*

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, British fiction tried to escape, by exteriorizing itself, from the nothingness in which the Victorian age had been foundering about 1885. England flung itself, so to speak, outside of itself, in space and in time. So it was that the novel found itself led toward the romantic, toward adventure, by Stevenson, the exotics and the archaics; toward a feeling for action, race and discipline, a glorification of conquest and of Empire, by Rudyard Kipling and the colonials; toward scientific Utopias, satires or panaceas, by H. G. Wells and the visionaries of social mechanism.

And indubitably there was, in these centrifugal movements, a kind of breaking away from the nineteenth-century novel which had by preference turned inward. But romanticism, utopianism, and energism are only means of escape. To withdraw oneself from a social or moral problem is not to resolve it, but to evade it. It is essential to keep one's eyes at home if one is to know one's own house.

Parallelly and simultaneously, the old introspective spirit still continued to exist in a part, not the least nor less fervent part, of the novelistic tribe. It found excitement in revolt and in criticism. A legion of women authors who were happily satisfied by neither adventure, action, nor Utopia, began passionately to explore the questions of sexual morality, marriage and love, law and religion, which are responsible for the fate of woman, and consequently for the fate of the family and humanity. In this fashion, from Sarah Grand to May Sinclair, there is born a literature that is weak artistically but socially powerful.

Better armed, stronger, masters of their trade, John Galsworthy, and after him many a young novelist, worked the same field and reached farther in surface as in depth. Others, like Arnold Bennett, the provincials, the landscape-painters of social life, also looked about them, toward the interior of the city, and produced documents rather than instruments.

All, however, were revolutionists. The most apparently disinterested observation was accompanied by an invisible disintegrating force. All continued the destruction of the empiric, utilitarian and Victorian edifice. At the dawn of the twentieth century, England was living in a fever of disruption, regarding which the novel, alone, would furnish sufficient evidence.

Instrument of one of the most rapid moral and social transformations that a country has ever undergone, it could not fail to modify itself. When the war broke, the mould of English fiction was in the process of breaking between the hands of certain young novelists who were inspired by Russian amorphism and a kind of cosmopolitan anarchism. Samuel Butler, Henry James, Ro-

main Rolland, Gorki and Dostoievski were simultaneously exercising contradictory influences on these innovators who had no master and no doctrine. Hugh Walpole, Compton Mackenzie, Oliver Onions, J. D. Beresford, Gilbert Cannan, D. H. Lawrence, Frank Swinnerton, and Stacy Aumonier are among the most recent English novelists. Their talents could not be more diverse. It is only convenience of development that obliges me to unite them in a single group.

The great war has inspired a host of novels that escape the limits of this study, and it will continue to exercise a formidable literary influence for several generations. We shall stop at the young survivors who had begun their work before this convulsion of humanity. Stevenson, Kipling, Wells, May Sinclair, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, the women novelists, the younger generation—around these names and these groups is arranged the development of contemporary fiction in England.

## II

### *Novels of History and Adventure from Stevenson to Maurice Hewlett*

While the realists and the psychologists, the social novelists and the symbolist novelists, were exhausting themselves in formulas and boring the general public, a young Scotsman was breathing new life into adventure fiction. Without bothering with literary fashions, he was addressing himself to what is most youthful and most wholesome in every generation, he was enchanting children, young and old, and he was taking possession of the urchin that survives in the mature man.

Gifted with a charming personality, he took the pains and he had the courage patiently to shape a style for himself. He was not merely a story-teller, but a writer. To be one of the great authors of the period he lacked nothing save a matter worthy of his manner.

Robert Louis Stevenson was thirty-three years old when he published *Treasure Island*, in 1883. It was his first great success. From this book dates the resurrection of the adventure novel.

The son of an engineer, the descendant of Puritans, he had found difficulty in evading the scientific vocation and the pious youth toward which his parents directed him. The weakness of his constitution furnished an excellent pretext for happy visits to France. All his life he naïvely, gracefully, exploited the misfortune of having been born a consumptive. When, at the age of twenty-four, he had won the consent of his family, he went to live in London, and there made friends among the critics and the poets: Sidney Colvin, Leslie Stephen, W. E. Henley, Edmund Gosse. They paved his way to success.

From his sojourns abroad he had brought back *An Inland Voyage* (1878), the charming account of a canoe trip on the rivers of France and Belgium, and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879), in which the sentimental graces of Sterne flowered again. But he lacked success and money; and he had need of them. At Barbizon he had fallen in love with Mrs. Fanny Osborne, who had returned to California, obtained a divorce, and now awaited him. He foresaw the opposition of his parents. Not wishing to ask them for financial aid, he sailed as an emigrant, and arrived at San Francisco half dead with

fatigue and exhaustion. By cable his father made him an allowance that permitted him to marry. He returned to Europe, stayed at Davos in the Alps, established himself for some time at Bournemouth, where he wrote *Dr. Jekyell and Mr. Hyde*, then *Kidnapped*, returned to America, and ended by settling in the Samoa Islands. There he passed the last three years of his life. The excellent short stories published under the title of *Island Nights Entertainments* and the volume of delicious *Vailima Letters* are the chief fruits of this period.

Whoever has not read Stevenson is ignorant of the wholesome charm of adventure stories that are well composed and well written. His friends have almost done him an injury by presenting this exquisite story-teller as a genius of the first rank. A reaction has set in. His talent as a writer is not contested; but the present generation would deny him all originality, all sincerity. "A *poseur* who exploits his charm," such is the verdict of one of his most recent critics. Again, he is called "an artful feuilletonist, pure as clear water, light as the void, who knows how to recount 'nothings' artistically."

It is true that Stevenson's characters are of an elementary simplicity. It is true that he composes and invents as though he had never suspected either the complexities of material existence or the problems of the moral life. But this does not hinder us from re-reading *Treasure Island* and *The Master of Ballantrae* when many a more ambitious work has lost all savour for us. It is no slight privilege to captivate at once the learned and the ignorant, childhood and old age. And then too Stevenson was, whether one wills it or no, a great master of prose. They are not so numerous, those English

novelists who have at the same time been accomplished writers. One may well pardon one of the most cultivated of them for having let it appear that he was.

Stevenson died in 1894, when Joseph Conrad was beginning to write. It is twenty-five years now since the latter inherited the mastership of the adventure novel. But he has added much to it, thanks to his incomparable experience of the sea, and to his comprehensive genius. He has vivified it, permeated it with all that he brought from the literary theory of Henry James. He has made of it something superior and new. The art of Joseph Conrad is more profound and more fertile than that of the story-tellers who preceded him. He belongs to another generation, to another race. When the romantic and romanesque movement, aroused by Stevenson, began to wane about 1904, Conrad had already enlarged and transformed it. He had introduced into adventure fiction a psychological and symbolical element that had renovated it, and new methods of composition and narrative which had made of it an unprecedented genre.

Between the death of Stevenson (1894) and the full literary development of Joseph Conrad (which dates from *Nostromo*, 1904) a group of writers, diversely and remarkably gifted, was perpetuating both Stevenson's manner and his spirit. Each member of this group possesses a very definite personality. None is an imitator. But this they have in common, that all of them give the romantic a place of prime importance in the novel, and make the story predominate over intention. In the name of an intellectualism which assumes superiority, it is easy to scoff at and disparage this literary genre. But

no less for that, it answers to one of the most natural instincts, the instinct for mystery and action; and at least it satisfies, quite as legitimately as do psychological twaddle and social dissertations, certain aspirations of humanity.

About 1892 and 1893, Edmund Gosse and George Saintsbury predicted the approaching end of purely literary modes, and the repercussion, the prolongation of the adventure fiction which Stevenson had just resuscitated. They were not mistaken.

Stevenson died without having finished one of his books: *St. Ives.* The task of completing it was entrusted to Mr. Quiller-Couch (since then Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch). This writer, who signs himself "Q," now occupies a famous chair of English literature. No better choice could have been made. The same gift of life, the same verbal felicity, the same sense of art and action that animates *Treasure Island* and *The Master of Ballantrae*, reappear in the adventure novels of "Q"; for example, *Dead Man's Rock* (1887) and *The Adventures of Harry Revel* (1903). Nowhere, not even in Scott and Stevenson, has the union of historic fidelity and humour, and of poetry, been closer than in *The Splendid Spur* (1889), which deals with the great civil war in the west of England, and in *Fort Amity* (1904), which evokes the unequal battle between France and England for the possession of Canada.

"Q" has not limited his efforts to novels of history and adventure. He is, also, what Stevenson was not: a sagacious, penetrating observer of the whole human soul, including its nooks and crannies; the faithful painter of a county and its types. He has been unable to keep himself from putting grace and gaiety, humour and poetry

into his pictures—which are, besides, quite correct—or from introducing anecdote even into document. Let us not begrudge it.

*Troy Town* is the little village of Fowey, in Cornwall. *The Ship of Stars* (1899) is the story of a Cornwall urchin, a type of those Celtic dreamers who become powerful men of action and who stir the world in the realization of their dreams. *The Westcotes* touches France more keenly, for it recounts the adventures of a young English girl and a French prisoner during the Napoleonic Wars.

*Hocken and Hunken* (1912) overflows with humour and good humour. Two old captains, grown salt from long lives on the sea, court an opulent and corpulent widow. Never did the country of Cornwall furnish types more human, more piquant than Mrs. Bodenna and her suitors.

In *Hetty Wesley* (1903), "Q" seems to have given his full measure. The young sister of Methodist prophets is sacrificed for their career as the humanity of man is sometimes immolated for his faith. The book is well constructed, the style is worthy of the subject.

Besides these books, Sir Arthur Quller-Couch has written ballads, parodies, essays, and he is one of the soundest and keenest critics in England. He has produced too much to have excelled in any genre, save in the provincial novel and the story of adventure; but none the less his work deserves to be better known in France.

Rider Haggard (to-day Sir Henry Rider Haggard) and Conan Doyle (to-day Sir Arthur Conan Doyle), who are far from having the same literary talent, have for a long time enjoyed popularity, even in France.

The first was at one time a colonial official in South Africa, then later became an English agriculturist. He

knows life and the business of life. He has studied at close range, for example, gold and diamond mines, the co-operatives of Denmark, and conditions of life in many a land. When he deals with Mexico or Egypt, with Palestine or Scandinavia, he knows whereof he speaks. In this respect he is distinguished from the horde of *feuilletonistes* who discover Patagonia or the Sahara from the depths of their easy chairs. Surrounding the incredible adventures which are born of his imagination, there is always, especially in his African stories, an element of personal observation and accuracy, an atmosphere of reality. John Buchan, in *Prester John*, for example, has renewed in our day the impression created by the first books of Rider Haggard: *King Solomon's Mines* (1881), *Maiwa's Revenge* (1888), *She* (1887).

Conan Doyle, doctor of medicine of the University of Edinburgh, is not without scientific culture. His *Sherlock Holmes* has gone around the world. The detective story is not a very elevated type; but Conan Doyle has furnished models of the genre. He is, after his fashion, chief of a school. Perhaps no other English writer has been more abundantly translated for a score of years, or more copiously imitated and plundered. And here is a fact calculated, beyond doubt, to recall humility to those authors and critics who place the literary and artistic value of a narrative above composition, invention and action. Conan Doyle and those like him have no other quality than the knowledge of how to arrange facts, create a mystery and dissipate it. But they have that quality. And it has proved sufficient for them to captivate, to capture millions of minds that are not all uncultivated. Conan Doyle has sometimes been compared to Poe because of his macabre power. But Poe was a

poet, a creator. Conan Doyle resembles him only as a good librettist resembles a great musician. There is more distance between Doyle and Poe than between Gaboriau and Doyle.

Henry Seton Merriman; F. T. Bullen, who was for fourteen years a sailor aboard a whaling-ship; John Masefield, a poet of great talent who began by writing powerful sea tales; and Neil Munro, who continued the Scottish work of Stevenson, also deserve mention among the adventure novelists of the close of the nineteenth century. None of them has produced anything comparable to the work of Cunninghame Graham, traveller, orator, socialist politician, member of Parliament, and an excellent writer to boot. Few men have more completely, more lovingly explored the universe, common heritage of all men. None has more obstinately sought contact with the still unpolished races, or more often met and more happily translated what these races preserve that is original and irreducible by civilization. Spain, Morocco, Mexico, the Pampas—he has interpreted these lands of Latin and Arab violence without design and without literary system, with no other concern than truth. His language is nervous, incisive, rapid, full of flavour, fertile in laconisms; and it is probable that his fame will continue to increase.

The naturalist, W. H. Hudson, is a specialist in South America. His short stories and some of his novels assure him a place in literary history. *Green Mansions* is the *Odyssey* of a Venezuelian on the Upper Orinoco. The beauty of the descriptions and the nobility of the allegory make this book, in my opinion, one of the best productions of its genre.

Hall Caine (to-day Sir Hall Caine) with all his vulgar crudity does not lack dramatic skill. His connexion with Rossetti had already made him known, when two wretched feuilletons—*The Shadow of a Crime* (1885) and *A Son of Hagar* (1887)—assured him an incredible popularity. He has written novels laid in the Isle of Man, in which rhetoric and literary pretension are equalled only by the lack of verisimilitude. No other contemporary English novelist, save perhaps Marie Corelli, has done more to fortify bad taste by sacrificing to it.

The wittiest and most amusing of worldly raconteurs, Anthony Hope (to-day Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins) began by participating in the deterioration of the adventure novel. *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) and *Rupert of Hentzau* (1898) won so great a success, and one so out of proportion to their value, that any less intelligent writer would have been spoiled. Anthony Hope happily turned to the worldly comedies in which he excels; the *Dolly Dialogues*, for example. In *Quisante*, and later in *Mrs. Maxon Protests*, he gave his measure as a novelist of manners.

The romantic novel was dying of its success; it was sinking into exaggeration, unverisimilitude, and cheapness, when Maurice Hewlett restored to it a certain temporary lustre. Humanist and historian, full of literary allusions, nourished on ancient and modern classics, master of a style which would be perfect were it not premeditated, permeated with all the myths and all the legends that have been preserved in books, rich in all that one can learn in a library and pore over in a study, Maurice Hewlett brought to the novel a culture which no other one of his contemporaries, it seems, had been priv-

ileged to possess. His first books and some of his latest are poetic or dramatic adaptations of legends and history of mediæval Europe: *The Forest Lovers* (1898), *Little Novels of Italy* (1899), *Richard Yea and Nay* (1900), *Brazenhead the Great* (1911), *The Song of Renny* (1911), *The New Canterbury Tales* (1901), *The Queen's Quair* (1904). In these an echo of Tennyson is heard. Everything in them is pure, noble, sometimes a little roguish, a little sugared. The prose is as ornate as an Italian chapel; it is shot with reflections of glass and silverware, with odours of incense and spices. But what historical sense, what archaism of good alloy there is in these reconstructions! How touching and alive is the evocation of Marie Stuart, for example, in *The Queen's Quair!*

*The Fool Errant* (1905), *The Stooping Lady* (1907) and *Mrs. Lancelot* (1912) mark a new development. They are novels of love, in the precious, mannered style that passions affected at the close of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. While reading *The Stooping Lady*, one asks oneself if Mr. Hewlett is imitating or parodying Meredith. One asks oneself nothing while reading *Mrs. Lancelot*. Here all is sincere and true. *Bendish* (1913) is a Byron ill disguised and mediocrely presented.

Here ends the connexion between Mr. Maurice Hewlett and the novel of adventure. To tell the truth, it steadily slackened from about 1904 onward. His stories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are already character studies. Beginning with *Open Country* (1909), he devoted himself more especially to the study of manners, to the novel of modern life. Senhouse, literary truant and gentleman vagabond, is a worthy cousin to Gals-

worthy's Louis Ferrand, to the Paragot of Mr. Locke. But even in the elegant residences and country-seats of England and Scotland, Mr. Hewlett is able to revive the classic myths. *A Little Iliad* brings Helen and Hector, Priam and Menelaus, back to life, with contemporary features and in a twentieth-century setting. *Love and Lucy* transports the legend of Eros into a solicitor's household. Exercises of wit? Not merely that. For the eternal truth of the myth subsists in the modern setting, and the evocation of the legend is allied to a fidelity of observation and an analytical power that are sufficient for success. The style, which is more sober than in the earlier books, and nourished by the most exquisite literary substance, is a feast for the literary. . . .

Mr. Hewlett's latest developments do not belong to the romantic novel. Events occupy less place than ideas, than analysis, sometimes less than satire. One feels other influences in these later books. It was about 1904 that Maurice Hewlett abandoned legend, history and the fiction of adventure. He had bestowed upon it a great privilege, that of ending beautifully.

## III

### *Precursors of the Contemporary Novel*

Henry James, John Galsworthy, Maurice Hewlett, all those who have influenced the development of the contemporary novel, were or are nourished by French civilization. William J. Locke is permeated by it to his finger-tips. For ten years he obscurely wrote little melodramas, in which generous heroes took unto themselves the sins of others, and thereafter lived a wandering life

as tramps, Bohemian philosophers, and often as drunkards. The truculence of M. Richepin, the intellectual fantasy of M. Anatole France, the memory of Verlaine, inspired these creations. But for all this they would have been forgotten, had not William J. Locke been gifted with a smiling irony and a delicious style.

*The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne* (1905) and *The Beloved Vagabond* (1907) brought their author a sudden, irresistible and universal fame. Sir Marcus, intellectual, literary benedictine, gathers up from the London streets little Carlotta, a waif from an Alexandrettan harem. This small human animal very gently turns his ideas, his house, and his whole existence topsy-turvy. The charming episodic characters of Pasquale and Judith serve as foils to her.

Berzelius Nibidad Paragot, "the beloved vagabond," is one of the treasures of contemporary fiction. Unkempt, erudite, aimless, threadbare, full of wine and learning, genius and wisdom, genial and human, he is able to fall into the worst adventures, to succumb to the lowest temptations, without being either vulgar or displeasing. The story of his impossible love for an English society woman is not worth remembering. The memory of his peregrinations with Asticot and Blanquette de Veau may be effaced. But his own physiognomy remains in one's mind beside that of Falstaff. Paragot, often imitated, never equalled, is a contemporary acquisition.

Since then, William J. Locke has returned to inconsequential entertainments. *Simon the Jester* (1910) recounts the loves of a lady animal-tamer and an invalid. *The Joyous Adventure of Aristide Pujol* (1912) revives the picaresque novel. *The Glory of Clementina Wing*

(1911) contains a character that is pathetic, sincere, and convincing, that of the great woman artist, deprived of illusions and resources, who ends in Bohemia.

Robert Hichens is a more conscientious and a more profound writer. Why has he not given us all that he promised? It seems that he has lost himself in an excess of analysis, in a vain effort to attain the inaccessible, which may perhaps be explained by his musical education and his essays in occultism.

In 1894 he published *The Green Carnation*, a cutting satire on the æsthetic and symbolist movement, which made him famous. *An Imaginative Man* (1895) contains a curious pathological study, and lays bare the lies of an artificial civilization. *Felix* (1902) depicts a young Englishman, enamoured of literature, who discovers Balzac's tailor, becomes famous, loses his illusions, and serves as pretext for a mordant picture of literary life in London. Who could divine in these ironic productions the future author of *A Spirit in Prison? Flames*, in 1897, had revealed the secret tendency of his mind. It is a story of occultism, curious, original and morbid. But there was nothing to make one foresee the sudden blooming of his talent about 1904, after a period of meditation and work. For him, as for many other contemporary novelists, those years between 1903 and 1904 are a date of capital importance.

In 1904 he published *The Garden of Allah*, in 1906 *The Call of the Blood*, in 1908 *A Spirit in Prison*. These three books contain the best of his work.

After this, Robert Hichens quits England and goes to Africa and Sicily in search of an atmosphere that is simpler, closer to nature, in which passion stalks nakedly.

*The Garden of Allah* is the desert in the vicinity of Biskra; the love of a young Englishwoman for a Russian ex-monk; the mysterious attraction that Catholicism exercises upon weary souls. *The Call of the Blood* portrays a half-Sicilian Englishman, Delarey, who is led by the hereditary awakening of passions to betray his wife and to perish in a violent death.

The Sahara and Sicily are not merely the principal themes, they are almost the heroes of these two powerful books, which made a sensation in their day. *A Spirit in Prison* follows *The Call of the Blood* and contains an inexorable but interminable analysis of the effects produced by a moral lie, even though told in the best of causes, on him who utters it and on him who profits by it.

Since then, Mr. Hichens has written nothing that is reminiscent of these three books. His is a destiny analogous to that of E. M. Forster. After *The Longest Journey* (1907) and *Howard's End* (1910) there was good reason to consider the latter as one of the novelists most richly endowed with ideas and talent. The whole first part of *Howard's End*, particularly the conversations of the Misses Schlegel, is full of intellectual and sentimental pith. In this book one breathes a kind of learned freshness that is unique in English literature. The second part is less happy and verges on melodrama. But in this book there was a formal promise that has not yet been fulfilled.[1] However, Mr. Forster has scarcely passed forty.

An immense public, that is cultivated enough not to enjoy the sentimental stories of the *feuilletonistes*, but too busy or too superficial to seek in reading anything more than unwearying diversion, furnishes support to a host

[1] Many critics have now hailed "A Passage to India" as the fulfillment of this promise.

of novelists and annually absorbs tons of reading-matter. It is of these readers and these authors that the foreigner is thinking when he remarks on the deplorably bad taste of the English public, and the puerility of the books on which it is fed. One forgets that, according to an approximate calculation, seventeen million out of forty million Englishmen read at least one volume of fiction a month. Had our writers the same number of clients, is there any assurance that they would be less puerile, less prolix? One forgets that by the side of this public and its habitual providers there is another public and other authors, who have no fewer ideas and perhaps no less talent than our French writers, while their view of human relations is quite as broad and perhaps more exact. It is ignorance that makes us confound English novels and place them all on the same level. We attribute to all the characteristics of the greatest number, without remembering that the small number of English novels that are equal to ours, although different, alone surpasses our total production.

Among the worthy entertainers of the great, cultivated, sentimental, traditional public, E. F. Benson has made a name for himself by the creation of the character of *Dodo*, a pretty chatterbox, kin to Gyp's heroines, and a cousin of Babs and Dolly. *David Blaize* is a story of English schoolboys that deserves to be better known. This author must not be confounded with his brothers, R. H. Benson, who died in 1914, and the poet Arthur Christopher Benson. Jacobs, the painter of sailors, Jerome K. Jerome, and F. Anstey artfully handle the humour of *Punch*. *David Penstephen* by Richard Pryce and *The Triumph of Tim* by H. A. Vachell have deservedly been published in France, and give a just idea

of the genuine talent that their authors have scattered through a host of volumes. Stanley Weyman, who ceased writing ten years ago, has recently repeated the *tours de force* that he executes on the border-line of history and literature. Sir Gilbert Parker is exploiting with remarkable success and felicity the history of Canada. There is more than talent in *When Valmond Came to Pontiac* (1895).

For thirty years Frankfort Moore has distributed his adroit society novels over two hemispheres. He is a great connoisseur and an excellent painter of English literary life in the eighteenth century. *The Jessamy Bride* brings on the scene Goldsmith and Johnson, Burke and Garrick. *A Nest of Linnets* (1901) artistically relates the story of Sheridan and Elizabeth Linley.

G. S. Street, who is one of the best of contemporary essayists, has renovated and modernized Thackeray's *Book of Snobs* and *The Trials of the Bantocks*. He is not inferior to his model.

Hilaire Belloc is not merely an excellent satirist, nor Gilbert K. Chesterton merely the wittiest, the most paradoxical of journalists and at the same time the most naïve of religious believers: they have both written novels. The concise power of the political satire in *Mr. Clutterbuck's Election* and *A change in the Cabinet* has caused Hilaire Belloc to be compared to a modern Swift. In *The Ball and the Cross* (1910) Chesterton preaches a joyous optimism, a regenerative Catholicism. *Manalive* (1912) is closer to real life, and at the same time it more exactly reflects the true manner of the brilliant journalist.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE REGIONALISTS

### I

### *Scotland*

The advent of realism, between the years 1880 and 1890, necessarily favoured the provincial and regional novel. Precise, local, localized observation is, indeed, the foundation of all literature that calls itself realistic. It is true that nowhere do the cultivated classes appear more generally alike than in the British Isles. So, too, there are few countries in which the external aspects of nature and of men are, apparently, more devoid of contrasts. But in appearance only. Americans and Continental Europeans, accustomed as they are to sharper inequalities in physical as well as human nature, appreciate but slowly the wealth of diversity which lies concealed in Great Britain. Between the mountains of Scotland and Wales, the moors of the North and West, the bogs of Ireland, the central plain of England, the downs of the South, the fens of the Wash, the hills of the Wold and Cotswolds, the contrasts are obviously less striking than between the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Rocky Mountains on the one hand, and the Landes, the Prairie and the Savanna on the other; but there is no surety that they are less profound, less real, or that the differences between popula-

tions and classes are less perceptible. Setting, environment, costume, language, even colour are only rusty keys when it is a question of opening the human heart. It might possibly even be maintained that the more perfect the resemblance is between beings of the same origin, the sharper the slightest dissimilarity appears; witness certain dramas among ants and among bees. Even in the cultivated classes of the British Isles, behind the screen of social conformity which shelters them, one often distinguishes the mark and sometimes the stigmata of origin. In fine, the artistic image depends less upon the thing observed than upon the quality of the observation and the methods of the observer. Even in photography there are plates more or less sensitive, negatives more or less developed. And mole-hills seen on a path may, without deception, give the impression of a volcanic or lunary landscape.

Scotland, Ireland and Wales have never yet been morally centralized, unified, identified with England; and perhaps to-day they are less so than ever. On the other hand, at no time has literary observation been more localized and more intense. It must not be forgotten that the foremost writer of England, the father and still living prophet of the present novel, has spent his life in interpreting a small region of his country that differs scarcely from the rest, and that if one held to this fact the regional novel would be the most significant form of contemporary fiction.

Since Scott and Galt, the Scottish novel had been notably represented by no one save George MacDonald, when Stevenson conquered it and annexed it. But Stevenson, although the bulk of his work was inspired by

his native land, rapidly became a citizen of the world in fact as in spirit. Besides, like Walter Scott himself, he expressed little more that the powerful and human virility of southern and central Scotland, and his point of view remained, on the whole, Anglo-Saxon. He knew nothing of the quasi-pagan mysticism of the western isles and peninsulas. "The Celtic twilight," observes Mr. Harold Williams, "never visits his pages." It was in Ireland, not Scotland, that the renaissance of the Gaelic spirit manifested itself. Alone, or almost alone, the books of William Sharp, published under the name of Fiona Macleod,[1] reflect the myths, the superstitions, the fatalism, the sombre melancholy, the intense spiritual life of the Scottish Gael.

William Sharp was a writer of great ambition, belonging to a great line. His style may be compared to those of Walter Pater and Lafcadio Hearn. Nor was he exempt from rhetoric and artifice. He was a poet and a seer as much as he was a novelist. Neil Monro seems at first to have submitted to the Celtic influence, following the steps of William Sharp in *The Lost Pibroch* (1896), then to have deliberately veered toward the form and substance of the historical novel as conceived by Stevenson. *John Splendid* (1898) has many points of contact with Alan Breck.

For some years before this time, Scottish fiction had been moving in another direction with J. M. Barrie (today Sir Matthew James Barrie). A brilliant and cautious journalist, he was writing leaders for the *Nottingham Journal* in 1883; a little later he went over to the *St. James Gazette*, and it was in this old organ of

[1] For example, *Romances of the Isles* (1894); *The Mountain Lovers* (1895); *The Sin-Eater* (1895).

social conservatism that he published, not his first works, but the first that counted. It may be said that *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888) and *A Window in Thrums* (1889) gave new life to Scottish fiction.

History and adventure are supplanted by minute observation of humble folk. An attentive realism is substituted for the poetry of action. Daily and lowly village life, eventless and void of enterprise, becomes the unique subject. Two savoury elements heighten the taste of it all: discreet humour, innocent of irony, which never goes beyond a smile; and, above all, a permeating but disciplined sentimentality whose charm is diffused without one realizing it. The whole is so well-proportioned, so happily blended, that the artifice is scarcely perceptible. Yet it is an artifice, a sleight of hand. J. M. Barrie is one of the most remarkable prestidigitators among contemporary novelists: from the realistic hat he brings forth a sentimental rabbit.

These two volumes of short stories and sketches marked the advent of a school that the poet Henley was later to dub "The Kailyard School." Constant employment of dialect and love of local colour are its essential but not distinctive traits. Wit and humour also play their rôles in it. But it is the sentimentality, the emotional content of these books which won them their great success. *The Little Minister* (1891) is the most popular, and *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896) the noblest and most touching of the Scottish studies that assured Sir James Barrie's fame as a novelist. It is common knowledge that he is even more celebrated as a playwright. Ian Maclaren (Rev. John Watson) and S. R. Crockett have exploited the same domain, not without risking insipidity and satiety through

excess of sentiment. Both are clergymen, and were widely read in the rural parishes.

Toward the beginning of the twentieth century, the Scottish school was gradually dying out in an artificial and bloodless atmosphere, when George Douglas published *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901). He was then less than thirty-two, and he died in the following year. Like many of his compatriots, he was irritated by the systematic idealization of Scottish manners and the lachrymose tendency which Barrie's novels had made fashionable. His peasants are brutes, but real brutes. They get drunk, fornicate, and fight on occasion. Here is the reverse of the medal that the Kailyard School had been polishing for ten years. No one, to my knowledge, except Alfred Ollivant, and he only in certain respects, has continued the veracious and wholesome work of George Douglas. Ollivant is the author of one of the best and most beautiful animal stories that I know: *Owd Bob*, an epic of shepherd dogs and shepherds themselves, equal to anything that Bret Harte and Jack London have produced on similar subjects. In my opinion it is surpassed by only one book of its kind: Sir Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld.*

## II

## *Ireland*

The Celtic renaissance and the Irish literary movement have revealed at least one great lyric poet, Yeats; one great dramatic author, Synge; and one seer, one creator, one poet of the first rank, George W. Russell. The Irish

novel has not as yet, in the same degree as drama and poetry, profited by this awakening of national consciousness. Ireland is still in the imaginative and active period of its intellectual renovation. For works that exist primarily by observation, a more serene atmosphere is perhaps necessary. At the same time it is singular that the name and works of a writer such as James Stephens, at once novelist and poet, are not already famous abroad. *The Crock of Gold* (1912) is a poem, a kind of fairy-tale in prose, in which appear the gods and heroes of Celtic Ireland, gnomes, humans, beasts and insects. One sometimes regrets that the young author wished to make them say too many things, but it is a book truly and profoundly original, overflowing with feeling and poetry.

*The Charwoman's Daughter*, a short novel of common life in Dublin, relates the story of a poor young girl at the time when she is becoming a woman. Without the symbol being anywhere expressed or forced, it is also the story of poor Ireland when she is becoming a nation. I shall not be reproached for too frequently hailing a masterpiece in these pages; but I can indeed say that *The Charwoman's Daughter* is a little marvel of poetry, grace, penetration and truth.

"Mary Makebelieve lived with her mother in a small room at the very top of a big, dingy house in a Dublin back street. As long as she could remember she had lived in that top back room. She knew every crack in the ceiling, and they were numerous and of strange shapes. Every spot of mildew on the ancient wall-paper was familiar. . . . Her mother seldom washed at all. She held that washing was very unhealthy. . . . Her mother's face was the colour of old, old ivory. . . . Her eyes were as big and as black as pools of ink and as bright as

the eyes of a bird. . . . Mary Makebelieve loved her mother very dearly, and her mother returned her affection with an overwhelming passion that sometimes surged into physically painful caresses."

The characters of the two women reveal most happily the incredible contrasts and infinitely precious nuances of the feminine soul in the people of Ireland. In addition to its high literary value, the book is valuable as a psychological and social document. Nothing is stranger, nothing more original, than the survival of the Celtic temperament in the life of Irish working-women: intense imagination and primitive temperament, violent reflexes, extreme sentimental culture and extreme intellectual ignorance, purity of heart and frankness of feeling. A fluid yet eloquent prose, much worked over without appearing so, clothes this charming narrative in a kind of learned simplicity that recalls the best story-tellers of the eighteenth century. Not that James Stephens is a savant, but he has the gift of evocation, and first of all he has lived the life of the humble. His friendship with George W. Russell has done much for his literary culture. He brings to his work a wealth of gifts, a warmth of spirit, and an artistic devotion that command respect. It would be exaggeration to say, on the evidence of two or three books—of which one alone is of the first rank—that James Stephens has realized his destiny. Proud of his origin and his country, permeated with the rich and noble legends that are the source of Celtic history, he is now applying himself to the worthy interpretation of these legends, and if he succeeds his efforts will result in nothing less than the revelation of a new classic literature.

It was in the north of Ireland, in the industrial metropolis of Belfast, that St. John Ervine found the

material for *Mrs. Martin's Man.* Here is no grace and little poetry, but a strong and frank depiction of manners, a vigorous character study. The Martins of St. John Ervine and the Makebelieves of James Stephens belong to the same social *milieu*—that in which one is never sure of the morrow. Yet there is between these women the same difference that lies between Belfast and Dublin, which is to say between the north and south of Ireland. Martha Martin has neither the time nor the desire to cultivate her misfortunes. She scorns the crown of thorns. Betrayed by her husband and by her sister, she remakes her own life, that of her children, and that of the guilty. She re-establishes order around her with the irresistible power of good sense, self-denial, and she pursues existence with no other rule than that of ending it with a heart innocent of all reproach. In a sordid *milieu* she realizes the highest human ideal.

Forrest Reid is less specifically Irish. In him one finds again the conflict of generations, the influence of the subconscious, the haunting presence of the supernatural which characterize the work of the younger English generation. But there is something fluid, impalpable, in the development of his best books (*At the Door of the Gate*, for example) which distinguishes him from his British contemporaries. He treats modern subjects in the modern manner, but with an "elusiveness," an indiscernible ease that are sometimes disconcerting.

In addition, Darrell Figgis must be cited among the good writers and novelists of Ireland; and Stephen Gwynn, who is one of the most cultivated, most curious, and richest minds of his country and his time. Finally there is James Joyce, who does not lack talent, but who still takes pleasure in startling people. I have said

enough to show that the poverty of the Irish novel is only relative. It is an axiom subject to revision.

## III

### *Dartmoor and Cornwall*

The western peninsula of England, occupied by Devonshire and Cornwall, is for the English what a far-southern Brittany would be for the French. The languor and mildness of the climate, the harshness of the landscape, are translated in the local soul by a mixture of unconstraint, mysticism and violence. At the border of the two countries, the solid mass of Dartmoor rises, beaten by winds and rains, girdled by cliffs, like a fortified island as yet unpenetrated by modern civilization. The fields and orchards of Devonshire envelop this rugged region with gentleness and charm. Desolate lands covered with heather, hills sharp and rugged, inhabited by a sparse and hardy population, are drowned in fogs and harassed by tempests. Its altitude is modest, its expanse is small, but it is indeed a land apart. Dartmoor and Cornwall have been discovered afresh by the present generation of writers; no region is more frequented by the novelists of to-day. Here, a few hours from London, they find a world entirely different from rural and urban England. A whole literature has been born of this frequentation and this contrast.

For twenty years now, Eden Phillpotts has turned out his annual novel of Dartmoor. From *Children of the Mist* (1898) to *Widecombe Fair* (1913), this considerable body of work has unfolded itself, always of even quality and with few differences. The plot scarcely varies: two

women and a man, or two men and a woman, who love one another, betray one another, suffer, forgive or revenge themselves. The violence of animal instincts, the morbid influence of certain inherited traits, certain superstitions, and the singularities of a race that is still primitive, infinitely complicate this eternal theme. The true hero of Eden Phillpotts is Dartmoor. All his novels develop in practically the same fashion. Each portion of the narrative is introduced and closed by a conscientious description. Whoever has read Eden Phillpotts' books knows all the aspects of his country. He is a sincere, persevering novelist, a little heavy, a little clumsy, who understands and translates nature more happily than men.

John Trevena (Ernest G. Henham) treats the natural forces of Dartmoor with a power and a poetic vision that Eden Phillpotts has never attained. His trilogy—*Furze the Cruel* (1907), *Heather* (1908) and *Granite* (1909)—was saluted in its day by almost universal homage, which was accorded the writer, the poet and the seer even more than the novelist. John Trevena is a creator of myths. He has almost given life and living personality to the invading furze, the moving heather, the immortal granite. In this same setting J. Oxenham has worked out a drama of conscience that is not without interest: *My Lady of the Moor.*

It is an evocation of the same kind, but in quite another region, that Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has attempted and successfully achieved in her *Sussex Gorse.* The rustic hero of the book consecrates his life to the conquest of an uncultivated land. To this he sacrifices his youth, the lives of his wife and his children. It is the

epic of land-clearing. *Little England* is less satisfactory. It seems as though Miss Kaye-Smith had said to herself: "I, too, shall write a novel of the war," and that she had succeeded in so doing, but joylessly. Tom Beatrup, his sister Ivy, Thyrza Honey, and the Sumptions, father and son, are rather thin characters when compared to Boarzell. *Tamarisk Town* is a pendant to *Sussex Gorse*. The creator of the town, like the creator of the farm, immolates his happiness and that of his family in the pride of success. These books are painstakingly written and vigorous, but they are not very convincing, and they do not always create the illusion of reality. This whole literature of southern England is visibly inspired by the novels of Thomas Hardy, but it does not make one forget them.

## IV

### *London*

The enormous growth of London, Birmingham and Manchester, without counting many another industrial agglomeration, has transformed each of these cities, from the viewpoint of manners, into a kind of nation. Many small, independent countries, in Europe and elsewhere, have fewer citizens and are less united. When one reflects that four-fifths of the English people are grouped in cities of more than ten thousand inhabitants, it is easy to realize that these human ant-hills offer a field for the observation of manners that is much vaster than the counties and the country-side. The contrasts here are less keen, the characters less sharply cut, for it is a condition of industrial life that it should constrain the multitude to the same gestures. But it is a very hasty

observation that fails to discern, beneath the apparent community of existence, an extreme diversity of sentiment and tendency, even in the most homogeneous groups. Each of the great industrial cities has its moral atmosphere, and each is a world in which other worlds are revealed.

Dickens studied London thoroughly in most of its aspects. But, at the end of the last century, the London of Dickens had become almost archaic. The great British city was gathering and absorbing, without assimilating them, the thousands of immigrants who have peopled the East End. The West End itself, under the influence of financiers and Americans, was rapidly being transformed into a cosmopolitan city. It seems that this double movement might readily have ended in the disintegration of London's identity, had not there been established, at about the same time, a kind of great-city patriotism, which poetry, and after it the novel, have served to popularize. A whole literary school grouped itself around the new reviews: *The Yellow Book*, *The Savoy*, and *The Albemarle* were then reawakening British imagination by means of French influences. This school found in the city of London the setting and the motives of its inspiration. In return, it created a literary soul, a personality common to those united cities which form the English capital.

The principal critic of this period, Arthur Symons, has noted in his *Spiritual Adventures* the kind of intoxication with which he flung himself into the diverse and parti-coloured life of the London state:

"I had never cared greatly for the open air in the country, the real open air, because everything in the country, except the sea, bored me; but here, in the motley

Strand, among these hurrying people, under the smoky sky, I could walk and yet watch. If there ever was a religion of the eyes, I have devoutly practised that religion."

It is from this religion of the eyes that the new London novel has issued. I pass over the productions of William de Morgan, in which one finds but a repetition of Dickens' methods, applied to other types and other times. But about the year 1890 many poets brought to London the tribute of their art: Henley, *London Voluntaries;* Davidson, *Fleet Street Eclogues;* Symons, *London Nights.* The great poet Ernest Dowson, who sank into alcoholism, lived by choice in a shed on an East End dock, which he had inherited.

For thirty years a host of novelists have been describing London in all its aspects. There is scarcely a writer whom we shall cite among the most recent contemporaries who has not contributed to this collective work. Only a few—such as Arthur Morrison, *Tales of Mean Streets;* Somerset Maugham, *Liza of Lambeth;* Pett Ridge and Barry Pain—have made the London novel their mark and their speciality. These are not the best, but they are the most exact and the most scrupulous. The "Cockney School" was a school of drab and powerful reality, whose influence has permeated all contemporary literature, but without leaving a masterpiece. Perhaps the great novelist of the capital will be found among the young authors who began their evolution some twelve years ago: Gilbert Cannan, Compton Mackenzie, J. D. Beresford, and Hugh Walpole are to-day the best-known interpreters of multiple London existence.

For some years, Manchester has been supplying English literature with brilliant, moving writers who have not

spared the city of their origin once they have escaped from its money-grubbing atmosphere. Among them, for example, are Stanley Houghton (*The Younger Generation*), Gerald Cumberland (*Set Down in Malice*), and James E. Agate. I know of nothing more revealing as to the industrial North than the character and business of Reuben Ackroyd. If James E. Agate were content to depict and to narrate, he would probably become one of the most remarkable novelists of his time, for his capacity of evocation, the strength and precision of his language are really notable. Unhappily he suffers from the disease of monologue and dissertation. In *Responsibility*, one finds puerile pedagogic essays, mediocre pages of journalism, in the midst of an excellent and excellently told story; in short, all the *hors d'œuvre* to all the courses of a meal that is spoiled.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE FIVE GREAT CONTEMPORARY NOVELISTS

### I

### *Rudyard Kipling*

In 1896, three of the principal artisans of British imperialism happened to be in Cairo at the same time: Cecil Rhodes, Lord Cromer, and Dr. Jameson. They did not suspect that Rudyard Kipling, then in the first flush of his literary advent, would one day be considered the interpreter of their work and thought. All that they had to say about the matter may be summed up in that epithet of Lord Cromer's: "Cheeky beggar!" Not until his fortune was made did the young author receive a moral coat of arms and become sacred herald of the Empire.

He won fame with his first works, the short stories written in India, in which was manifested a literary talent extraordinarily precocious and powerful.

Afterwards exegesis possessed itself of these youthful masterpieces, and the exegetes find in them a faith in race, action and Empire, a contempt for love to the profit of energy; in short, a whole philosophy of individual and social existence.

Now Rudyard Kipling was seventeen years old when he returned from an English college to his natal India and went on the Lahore *Civil and Military Gazette* as sub-

editor and short-story writer. Most of his *Plain Tales from the Hills* were written before his twentieth birthday. Without great difficulty one can discover in the Anglo-Indian press of this period ready-made examples of the genre that he perfected while he exploited it. All his Indian short stories had been published in six paper-covered volumes before he was twenty-three. It is quite true that Kipling has become the poet and the novelist of British imperialism. But this occurred after his return to London in 1890, which coincided with the reaction of public taste against the silly trash of the decadents and the æsthetes. Then only did great fame come to him. Not until then was a consciousness of his mission formulated in his own mind. Up to the years 1890–1893, he was a specialist in India and the soldier. The comparative frankness and brutality of his stories created a sensation. I remember the impression caused in 1890–1891 by the first tales that he published in England. No revelation could have been more like a thunderbolt, no conquest more rapid or more complete. But the revelation was at first literary; this conquest had nothing to do with morality or politics. It was with *The Seven Seas*, in 1896, and *The Recessional*, in 1897, by his poetry, not by his Indian stories, that Kipling became the herald of the Empire.

Kipling and Wells are too much appreciated, too universally known in France, to require any detailed presentation of their work in this place. Others, less familiar, little translated or badly translated, require on the contrary explicit letters of introduction. It is now thirty years since I had the honour of introducing the work of Rudyard Kipling to his first translator, Robert d'Humières, during a sojourn in Egypt, and later to the

French public through the columns of the *Temps*. It is twenty years since it fell to my lot to perform the same service for H. G. Wells, since then translated by the care of M. H. Dauray. So I may be excused for being brief. The French public is familiar with almost all of Kipling save his poetry, that is to say perhaps the best of him. But here we are concerned only with the novel. And in the novel form, the literary virtue and artistic influence of Kipling have already had time to exhaust themselves.

What power, what magic was it, then, that served to assure his fame at an age when others are still at school? Let us put aside certain fortunate circumstances. He commenced to write at the time when æstheticism and symbolism were disgusting the men of action, curt thought, and immense energy who people the British Isles. Walter Pater, the literary prophet of the epoch, was proposing as an ideal for youth [1] the exclusive cult of internal beauty: "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life." One can judge what pleasure the colonials took in the emasculated art of the ecstasy-merchants! The lively, curt, strong manner of Kipling, just sufficiently shocking to awaken them (Cheeky beggar!), not sufficiently brutal nor truly true to scandalize them, was another virtue calculated to bring immediate success. Young as he was, far away in India as he was, Rudyard Kipling did not lack for practical encouragement. The Duke of Connaught, then commanding the military district of Lahore, became keenly interested in his first attempts. One knows what princely patronage means in such a *milieu*.

[1] Cf. J. W. Cunliffe, *English Literature during the Last Half-Century*.

But neither literary reaction nor social favour serves to explain, even accessorily, the explosion of such a genius. It burst without apparent preparation, like a natural phenomenon. No writer owes less to schools, to cliques, to personal relations. Who are his masters? He had no others than his temperament. And what brought this genius to birth, before its time? Immediate pressure of necessity, direct contact with life, and finally the exigence of business.

Rudyard Kipling was born a journalist. And journalist he was from the age of eighteen; not by halves, but completely, without reservations and without mercy. We should have to reconstruct the existence of inspired drill that he underwent on the Lahore *Gazette*, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, in order to understand the hasty blooming of his talent. He has to make himself read. He has only a corner of the paper. Not a word to lose. Nor is there a lost word; not one that does not count. A thousand others have attempted the express-story. He succeeds by instinct, at the first blow. Three-quarters of his work consist of short stories. All of those dealing with India before 1890 have been published by a Railway Library.

He is a journalist. He writes for everyone, for the pleasure, for the diversion—yes, the diversion—of his readers, and not simply for his own "ecstasy" as Pater commanded. But "everyone" in India must be understood by half. It is a society of soldiers and officials, whose culture is narrow but practical. He must seize their attention; time is short, life is full, it is hot—hold that attention, and all is well. Brevity, condensation, intensity, the art of suggestion as much as expression, acrobatism of style if necessary—such are the qualities

of the form that young Kipling imposes on the English story. It is unaccustomed to them. The public is carried away by this suggestive rapidity. It is a revolution.

Short and sharp, suppressing everything that can retard the narrative, he indicates the indispensable, evokes without expressing, runs on to the end, and explains his characters only by making them act. Emotion is revealed by a word, an attitude, a repetition. He has the gift of taking the reader into his confidence, with a wink. He emphasizes the verisimilitude by a detail, an artifice if you will, and passes on, passes on quickly. "There is," said Stevenson, "a torrent of life in these tales."

*Plain Tales from the Hills, The Story of the Gadsbys, The Phantom Rickshaw*—here is English society in India, at once gay and tragic, a prey to action and distraction, superficially viewed by a possessed adolescent (Cheeky beggar!).

*Soldiers Three* is the British soldier, rascal and good fellow, respectful and free towards his officers, sentimental without effusiveness, coarse without malice, heroic by habit, by example, by virtue of training and *esprit de corps*, smelling of tobacco, whisky and sweat, and revealing, in the last analysis, only what he jolly well wishes to of his coarseness as well as his nobility. The mitigated realism of this apparition, its restrained audacity, made a sensation.

*In Black and White* and *Under the Deodars* give us the native life, swarming and mysterious. *Life's Handicap* (1890) and *Many Inventions* complete this cycle of Indian stories, in which Kipling has no rival.

Like Defoe, like so many great writers, Rudyard Kipling brought his art forth from his trade. Journalist

and reporter he is in his poetry, in his life, in his work, save perhaps *The Jungle Book*. His short stories are to the novel what the interview is to the article: bits of news. His poems are to poetry what the present is to eternity. At seventeen he began with an ode to Queen Victoria, *Ave Imperatrix*, published on the occasion of an attempted assassination. It was on the occasion of her jubilee that he published *The Recessional*. He learned nothing, let nothing pass from his grasp, without extracting from it "a message." After India and the Anglo-Indians, he interviewed other countries, other societies, other men—locomotives, machines, and even a sea-serpent, which furnished him with one of his best stories: "The Tale That Will Never Be Told." And there is no doubt that had he not been a poet, a great poet, a creator, a genius, all these interviews, prosaic or inspired, sometimes a little forced, would not have enchained the attention of men. And indubitably, too, it is true that once he became conscious of his rôle and of his age, he made his work express the summary conception of order, discipline, benevolent and obtuse domination, which was at the moment the ideal of his race. This has been said times enough, and I myself said it as soon as anyone. But all this fails to explain the "why" and the "how" of his work and his influence. It is useless to sift anew causalities that are exhausted, and it is salutary to return to modalities. As for Kipling and Wells, henceforward known among us, it is desirable (and probable) that the next generation should cease to view them exclusively as prophets. It will remind itself that they were first of all writers, that is to say journalists. It will be amused to think that certain persons feared to diminish their importance by viewing them from this

angle. As if Defoe and Swift, and the Pascal of the *Provinciales*, and all of Voltaire in prose, were not also journalists!

After returning to England in 1890, Kipling was "discovered" by another "enterprising journalist," Edmund Yates, and reviewed in the *Times*. He married, "did" America, missed fire with his first novel—*The Light That Failed*—and then turned back to India with *The Jungle Book*, which not only reveals his poetry but also contains practical notions regarding courage, sagacity and discipline, all of which serve him in lieu of a philosophy. Here again, the day is coming when the revelation of this rather terse doctrine will be held unimportant in comparison with the magnificent talent for writing and story-telling that is manifested in these pages. For the same reasons the marvellous living picture of modern India that Kipling has given in *Kim* will not cease to be admired.

*Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), *Actions and Reactions* (1909), *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), and *A Diversity of Creatures* (1917) are the development, the exploitation, and seem toward the last to mark the exhaustion, of his story-telling vein. Between times he had written for children those delicious tales that only a great poet could achieve.

It is now the fashion to decry him. A price must be paid for every great success, even when it is amply merited. His characters are only mechanical silhouettes. . . . Their variety is only apparent. . . . He has succeeded only with primitive peoples, children, savages, and the coarser specimens of humanity. . . . Love with him is only a form of action. . . . He is brutal and cheaply cynical. . . . His style is artificial, too much colour, too many pulleys . . . it creaks and blinds. . . .

It is not for us to defend Rudyard Kipling: he belongs to his compatriots. Although in the day of common danger he realized and corrected his error, he has not always shown tenderness for France. But what a writer! What an evocator! What vitality! Above all, what an inimitable story-teller!

What a foreigner may say of Kipling—a foreigner who, without ever having had personal relations with him, has none the less read each of his books as it appeared, for a generation, and who has helped to make them known—is that no other English writer of this day has done more to assure the intellectual radiation of England, nor done more to perpetuate the deserved reputation which that country enjoys of producing in every age at least one renovator in the art of narrative.

II

## *H. G. Wells*

Stevenson and Kipling, who turned the novel toward exoticism and adventure, have, if one may so phrase it, directed it toward the outside world and elevated it in space. In 1895 Stevenson had just died and Kipling had just pronounced his message. H. G. Wells, who was then just beginning to write, has in a sense continued their work, for like them he has exteriorized the literary imagination. But it was in time, and toward the future, that he began by displacing the interest of the novel.

Like Kipling, H. G. Wells was at the outset a journalist, that is a writer turned toward the present, not the eternal. But what a contrast between their subjects and their methods! Hereafter their secret is revealed, their

art exposed. Whoever has the time and the desire may establish a parallel between Wells and Kipling as legitimately and as easily as between Dickens and Thackeray, or Meredith and Hardy: here is the Englishman of Little England opposed to the Englishman of Greater Britain; the scientific, revolutionary, sedentary socialist, all logic and intelligence, quick to destroy, incapable of adoration, opposed to the empiricist, the practical, traditional conservative, the man of discipline and action, who circles the globe, pays homage to force, and aspires to stability. Neither the one nor the other cares for beauty in itself. In this respect they both react with the same vigour against the ecstaticism in which English literature had paused for a moment. But the one depicts heroes, modern conquerors; while the other describes the reverse of heroism and conquest, the human and social waste of every metropolis, the price of all imperialism. It is in the future, by means of science, not conscience, by destruction, not conservation or expansion, by a system of thought, not by experience of life, that he attempts to renovate the human city. He is confused, ardent, formless. He is an author of Utopias. At the beginning of this book I have stated the rôle of the Utopia in fiction. It is the harbinger and accompaniment of all great renovations. Those of Wells have in effect coincided with the immense social, and consequent literary, transformation which has taken place in England at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Again it is necessary to take cognizance of dates. I admire those who regard an author like Wells, who is always developing, always in movement, with a single glance, as a carpenter looks at the trunk of a tree. But his growth is not exclusively concentric: so many circles,

so many years between the heart and the sap-wood. It is a tree, not a chopping-block, that we are studying. He has grown not only in diameter (that is the least apparent phase of his expansion) but in depth and in height, in roots, branches, and leaves.

From 1895 to 1900 there were five years in which Wells published nothing but romantic and scientific Utopias. To wit:

1895. *The Time Machine.*
1896. *The Island of Doctor Moreau.*
1897. *The Invisible Man.*
1898. *The War of the Worlds.*
1899. *When the Sleeper Wakes.*
1901. *The First Men in the Moon.*

After 1901 there appeared only three of these exercises, and these at long intervals:

1904. *The Food of the Gods.*
1906. *In the Days of the Comet.*
1908. *The War in the Air.*[1]

After this, not one of these fantastic productions. He has not abjured them, but since then he has himself compared them to "monstrous experiments of a puerile imagination."

Before 1900 we do not find one of those sociological dissertations, without setting and with no other char-

[1] I have omitted from this list the collections of short stories, for the date of their publication in volume form is not that of their real production. These are, besides *The Wonderful Visit: The Stolen Bacillus, Tales of Time and Space* (1900), *Twelve Stories and a Dream* (1903), and *The Country of the Blind* (1911).

acter than himself, in which he was later to delight. These are still Utopias, but didactic, not romantic. For the five years between 1903 and 1908 they were destined to be his almost unique vehicle of expression:

1902. *Anticipations.*
1903. *Mankind in the Making.*
1905. *A Modern Utopia.*
1906. *The Future in America.*
1907. *The Misery of Boots.*
1908. *New Worlds for Old.*

After this the didactic Utopia disappears from the long list of his works. Not quite, however, if one includes under this name the inquest on social forces in England and America that he published in 1914 under the title *An Englishman Looks at the World.* Not until after 1905 did the novelist emerge from behind the author of feuilletons and treatises. Not until then does Wells belong to the history of the Novel. He entered it, his work undergoing a transformation, just at the time when neo-romanticism was becoming extinct, when Galsworthy, May Sinclair and Bennett were beginning, when Henry James and Conrad, Hewlett and Hichens, were in the act of changing their manner.

*The Wheels of Chance* (1896) and *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900) had given signs of this development that was thereafter to continue without a halt. After 1908, not a single year passes without a study of manners and character from the pen of Wells:

1905. *Kipps.*
1909. *Ann Veronica. Tono-Bungay.*

1910. *The History of Mr. Polly.*
1911. *The New Machiavelli.*
1912. *Marriage.*
1913. *The Passionate Friends.*
1914. *The World Set Free.*
1914. *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman.*
1915. *Bealby. The Research Magnificent.*

After this, Wells belongs to the war, and to the war novel, which do not belong to this study. Besides, he has finished his evolution, exhausted his literary influence.

Having begun by projecting into an almost indefinite future his vision of man and of humanity—thirty million years in *The Time Machine*—he returns, after 1904, in company with almost all his contemporaries, to the internal study of his own time, his fellows, and his country. Such is the curve of Wells as a novelist. He has changed neither the ideas nor the form (alas!) of his works. But he has constantly narrowed and deepened their domain.

It is not astonishing that Mr. Wells, after his fruitful excursions into the improbable, should turn later to the depiction of the poor and appealing specimens of humanity that he has given us since 1905. He has recounted his own biography. One of his grandfathers, says Professor Cunliffe, was gardener at Penshurst, another an innkeeper at Midhurst, his father a professional cricketer and later small shopkeeper at Bromley. His mother, being left a widow, became housekeeper in the rich household in which she had formerly been lady's maid. At the age of fifteen he commenced work as a draper's assistant, later he entered a wretched school as assistant-master, obtained a scholarship to the Royal College of

Science at South Kensington, took his B.Sc. degree, ran about giving private lessons, became familiar with poverty, made some sentimental experiments, and plunged into scientific journalism with *The Time Machine*.

In *Bealby* and *Tono-Bungay* he has depicted upper-class life, as seen from the servants' hall, as well as his father's chemist's shop. We find the petty draper, the commercial employee in *The Wheels of Chance* and especially in *Kipps;* the student, the schoolmaster, the ignorant lover appear in *Love and Mr. Lewisham;* the brief, his own history is in all his novels. He has lived the sordid life of his pitiable heroes. He remains haunted by it. He has breathed the atmosphere of fetid streets, of squalid lives. To escape from all this is the object of his work and his life.

It is easy to deride his passion for demolition and re-imaginative shopkeeper in *The History of Mr. Polly.* In construction, the sourness and the occasional puerility of his strictures, the naïveté of his faith in science as the instrument of happiness and regeneration. But where save in his own experience should he find his inspiration? He has suffered, he curses his suffering. He has been saved, and he exalts his means of salvation.

In France, H. G. Wells is best known by the fantastic, sensational, amusing stories that he has based on modern scientific theories and new mechanical inventions. *The Time Machine* transports us a thousand centuries into the future. The descendants of the scientists, artists and intellectuals, emasculated by leisure and security, are at this date no longer anything more than superior larvæ on which feed the great whitish, pulpy creatures, all eyes

and arms, that are the descendants of the slaves of toil, exiled beneath the earth for the work of mining and industry.

In *The Island of Dr. Moreau* a surgeon succeeds in transforming beasts into men; and all the physical and moral traits of bestiality are perpetuated, recognizable and evident in humanity. *The Invisible Man*, full of humour, cleverly invented, well told, recalls in these respects *The Wonderful Visit*. *The War of the Worlds* is more pretentious. It tells of the invasion of the Earth by the inhabitants of Mars. *The First Men in the Moon* is a new version, with the perfection of details made possible by modern science, of Cyrano de Bergerac's tentative effort. *When the Sleeper Awakes* gives another picture of the future world. The privileged, satisfied classes have long maintained their power. The leaders of the poor and the malcontent profit by the awakening of man in the nineteenth century, with his long-defunct ideas of equality and fraternity, to galvanize the mob and conquer the mechanism of the world. But they have unchained two terrible forces of destruction: truth and virtue. With an army of Negroes, Ostrog re-establishes order, and gives up his life.

I pass by some of these Utopias that are occasionally repetitive.

*In the Days of the Comet* is the story of the world's reconstruction after the beneficent passage of a comet, which, by a miracle of green mists, serves to instruct, enlighten and rejuvenate the race. Humanity now *knows* what is necessary to it. It perceives the immense wastage of power and happiness to which the world previously had been given over. Also, it commences by burning

everything, destroying everything, because all had been without order and without plan.

In all these tales, H. G. Wells appears to us as a more vigorous Jules Verne. His characters are borrowed from real life, and are possessed of a perfect *external* verisimilitude even in the midst of the most incredible adventures. They speak a language that is lively and sharp, the tongue of the people and of reality.

There are more ideas and less fantasy in the *Anticipations* which follow. This whole group is didactic, positive, and reflects the socialist doctrine. They are neither novels nor treatises. It would be interesting to extract and to discuss the doctrine contained in them, but this does not belong to my subject. Mr. Wells is convinced that mankind will be happier when it is more comfortable. He founds the future City upon the development of mechanical inventions and the omnipotence of a perfected bureaucracy. By mechanism he frees humanity from suffering, and consequently from happiness; from effort, and consequently from liberty. It has been said of the constructive portion of his work that it represents the ideal of a first-class mechanic.

But his destructive criticism is also first-class. And it is at this point that Mr. Wells' Utopias are linked with the social novel of his age.

If he had written nothing but scientific stories of adventure and sociological dissertations, he would not have revealed his vision of life. He would not be a novelist. But, after 1905, he chose for his subjects from time to time, in between two future cities, those of his contemporaries whom he really knew. And it was then that the great Wells appeared.

A petty schoolmaster, ill-balanced, imposes upon himself a rigid discipline in order to succeed. He falls in love, marries without money, ruins his life. That is the subject of *Love and Mr. Lewisham.* The pathetic and truthful absurdity of this fate is repeated by that of *Kipps,* the little commercial clerk, thoroughly bewildered, ridiculous and touching, who plunges into a new social *milieu,* by virtue of a legacy, and is wounded by the unknown. In *Tono-Bungay* the picture is extended to include all English society, worked upon by commerce and advertising. Here again an imaginative and contradictory urchin escapes from the sordid life; he traverses the social mass of England from bottom to top, in the wake of an uncle bubbling over with schemes who represents the spirit of commerce and advertising in the act of conquering the old world. It is one of those frank, full books in which life is revealed by action. The reader forgets that he is reading: he experiences, he shares. This is the mark of narrative masterpieces. *Ann Veronica* caused a scandal. A young girl of the middle class emancipates herself, and finds not happiness but satisfaction and security in the liberty of her life and work. *Kipps, Tono-Bungay, Ann Veronica*—here are the books by Mr. Wells which most surely reflect the portion of mankind that he knows.

After 1910, Mr. Wells continued to write novels in which the complications of love and marriage are mingled with those of politics and religion. The richness and intensity of these books defy analysis. I do not know if there exists in the literary history of England a similar example of fecundity and literary freshness. The problem of marriage, for example, is considered and reconsidered in all its aspects, with unstudied vivacity. Too

often dissertation invades the narrative; but it is never boring. The style is formless and undistinguished, but it has one sovereign quality which saves all—movement. H. G. Wells is not a profound connoisseur of the human heart. Like Dickens, and for the same reason, he has never successfully drawn the portrait of a really cultivated woman.

No one can contest the fact that he is a great writer, a great story-teller. What he lacks is serenity, meditation. For twenty-five years he has produced without quitting his post. Is it astonishing that he ends by repeating himself? The abundance of such work precludes all concentration, all moral depth; but it is the most living, the most marvellously varied picture of an epoch, of a mind, of a certain kind of culture and civilization.

In his latest books, Mr. Wells has attacked the moral and religious problems that have been raised by the war. He has discovered the religion of humanity, the Creation of God in man, by man, and for man, that a century of religious philosophy had already popularized. What does it matter? It is with all the freshness and sincerity of his own experience that he traverses the road already travelled by so many others. He succeeds in being interesting even when he demonstrates the obvious and reveals a public secret. Such is the virtue of his temperament. One of his latest books, *Joan and Peter*, a novel of modern education, contains the summary of his thoughts, of his life, and of his age as he has seen it.

On the basis of his practice, Mr. Wells has constructed a theory of the novel. He claims the right of introducing into it everything, of expressing everything, of daring everything. So be it; he has not dared overmuch

that is new. But he has certainly expressed in his books more ideas and more facts than any other writer of his day.

What of his work will remain? Because Mr. Wells has enjoyed vast success without the expenditure of much art, and has succeeded by the single force of his temperament and ideas, it is sometimes said that his fame will be brief. But how many great writers have written ill —Balzac, for example? Any work is beautiful that has caused much to be understood, much to be felt. Success is not beauty, but it is a fact, and evidence of a certain beauty. "Literary justice," said Remy de Gourmont, "is an absurdity. A book is beautiful for those to whom it gives emotions. . . ." "Let men seek their pleasures freely."

## III

### *Arnold Bennett*

Tasker Jevons, hero of a recent book by Miss May Sinclair, is a minor journalist who "does" football matches for a sporting paper. But he has taken it into his head to become a great writer, or rather a greatly successful writer. It is not that he loves literature.

"But he wanted most awfully to arrive. How far he took himself seriously as a writer nobody will ever know. . . . I know that I am writing about a man whom many people still consider a great novelist and a great playright. God knows I don't want to disparage him. But to me what he has written matters so little; it has no interest for me except as his vehicle, the vehicle in which

he arrived. . . . His talent was so adroit that he might have chosen almost any other; chance and a happy knack and a habit of observation determined his selection of the written word. . . ."

At his first interview with the colleague who recounts his life, Tasker Jevons reveals himself:

"Anyhow he must have had some scruples of his own, since he waited for another context before remarking quietly that what I was doing now he would be doing in another six months. (And he was.) These things, he said, took time, and he gave himself six months. (Yes; in less than six months he was holding me up, again, in my own paper. I had to wait till he was 'out' before I could get in.) He didn't seem to boast so much as to trace for my benefit the path of some natural force, some upward-tending, indestructible Energy that happened to be him."

A few months later, he is a journalist; he is in love, he has taken his first step.

"He laid before me very soon what I can only call his plan of campaign. Journalism with him was a purely defensive operation; but the novel and the short story were his attack. He had dug himself in very securely that winter, and each paper that he had occupied and left behind him was a line of trenches that shifted nearer and nearer towards the desired territory. He didn't begin his assault on the public before he had secured his retreat. . . ."

"His first novel, he told me, was calculated, deliberately, to startle and arrest; to hit the public, rather unpleasantly, in the eye. *That*, he said, was the way to be remembered. It wouldn't sell. He didn't want it to sell.

What he wanted first was to gain a position; then to consolidate it; then to build. He talked like the consummate architect of his own fortunes.

"His second novel would be designed, deliberately, to counteract the disagreeable effects of his first.

" 'Why,' I asked, 'counteract them?'

"Because, he said, if he went on being disagreeable, he'd alienate the very sections of the public he most wished to gain. His retirement was simply the preparation for the Grand Attack.

"It was in his third novel that he meant, still deliberately, to come into his kingdom and his power and his glory, for ever and ever, Amen. His third novel, he declared, would sell; and it would be his best.

"I asked him if it wasn't a mistake to put his best so early in the series. Wouldn't it be more effective if he worked up to it? But he said No. He'd thought of that. There wasn't anything he hadn't thought of. That third novel was to start his big sales. And the worst of a big sale was this, that when you'd caught your public you were bound to go on giving them the sort of thing you'd caught them with, therefore he'd be jolly careful to start 'em with the sort of thing he happened to like himself, otherwise he'd have to spend the rest of his life knuckling under to them. He could get a cheaper glory if he chose to try for it; but a cheaper glory wouldn't satisfy him. That was why he decided to make for the highest point he could reach in the beginning, so that his very fallings off would be glorious and would pay him as no gradual working up and up could possibly be made to pay. Besides he wanted his glory and his pay quick. He couldn't afford to wait a month longer than his third novel. As for the different quality in the

glory, it would be years before anybody but himself could tell the difference, and by the time they spotted him he'd be at another game. A game in which he defied anybody to catch him out.

"He'd be writing plays. . . .

"I said: 'This isn't art, its speculation. You're taking considerable risks, my friend.'

" 'I've got to make money,' he said, 'and make it soon. I should be taking worse risks if I didn't.'

"It's marvellous how he pulled it off. Just as he said, dates and all. For he named the dates for each stage of his advance.

"That was in March; about a week before Easter, nineteen-six."

At the time of writing these lines I have never had the honour of meeting either Miss May Sinclair or Mr. Arnold Bennett, and I have not the slightest reason to think that the career of Tasker Jevons was in the least degree inspired by that of the latter novelist. On the contrary, it is infinitely probable that Tasker Jevons is a type, not a portrait. If some traits of his character and his work are applicable to one or another of the contemporary British novelists, the truth of the type is none the less interesting for that, and there is no reason to cry out: "Caricature!"

Let us now consider the career of Mr. Arnold Bennett as he himself has recounted it with disarming frankness —even as Tasker Jevons.

Born near Hanley, one of the Five Towns that he has depicted, he received a limited education, practised a little provincial journalism, and became a solicitor's clerk in London. He had read nothing. He had never been

possessed of the desire to write. But the desire "to arrive" devoured him. "Meanwhile," says Mr. Cunliffe, "he was 'gorging' on English and French literature, his chief idols being the brothers de Goncourt, de Maupassant, and Turgenev. . . . He got a story into the *Yellow Book*. He saw that he could write and determined to adopt the vocation of letters. . . ."

Followed a "humiliating" period of "free-lancing." Did it last for six months or more? "He became assistant editor, then editor" of the feminine and society periodical *Woman* (for this *milieu*, see Leonard Merrick's *Cynthia*). But the line of attack was through the short story, the novel. When he was thirty-one years old he published his first novel: *A Man from the North*. Was it written to sell? "With the excess of the profits over the cost of typewriting," Arnold Bennett had enough to buy himself a new hat.

But the young author brought into play an "upward-tending, indestructible Energy." At the end of the following year he wrote in his diary:

"This year I have written 335,340 words, grand total; 224 articles and stories. . . . My work includes six or eight short stories not yet published, also the greater part of a 55,000-word serial, *Love and Life*, for Tillotsons, and the whole draft, 80,000 words, of my Staffordshire novel, *Anna Twilight*." (Cf. Prof. Cunliffe.)

The line of retreat being assured, Arnold Bennett abandoned journalism. He had not yet written his great novel. That was the third. He spent five years on it, during which time he produced what he calls "recreations," "fantasies" and "farces," designed to keep the pot boiling. For a long time he had promised himself that on this occasion he would produce his best. *Une*

*Vie*, by Maupassant, was his model. But, to go his model one better, he wished to write two lives at a single stroke. And he succeeded. This was in truth a big novel, a great work, a great success: *The Old Wives' Tale* appeared in 1908.

Thenceforward the position was captured; it remained only to consolidate it. What did it matter, after this, if the famous author fell below his own high level? In between his literary works he permitted himself, wittingly, insolently, the most incredible lapses. These are patched-together affairs, brazen feuilletons, whose very titles are unworthy of citation. They have caused Arnold Bennett no blushes. He has boasted of them. For a time everything gets by, everything succeeds. Then he is already on another ground. He is writing articles. And one of them is entitled *What the Public Wants.*

In the midst of this masquerade are framed the sole works by Arnold Bennett that he himself considers durable, and the only ones, indeed, that deserve to be preserved: *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and *These Twain* (1916). None has eclipsed, none has equalled *The Old Wives' Tale.* But it is a cycle with a unity of place, subjects, style and manner.

Everyone is now familiar, thanks to Arnold Bennett, with the Potteries district in Staffordshire, which furnishes the whole world with bath-tubs, sinks, china tiles, and a host of other accessories difficult to mention, all enamelled without enamel, gleaming by virtue of their own substance. The five straggling villages, to-day joined by their own expansion, that comprise this industrial city, were fifty years ago living a peaceful, rural life. The comedy of their development, and a little of its tragedy, are met with in the work of Arnold Bennett.

In this commercial *milieu* there is no liveliness of ideas, no liveliness of emotion. All is grey, dull, and possessed of no other beauty than that which is at the bottom of every living thing, simply by virtue of the fact that it exists. To have made this beauty perceptible is a *tour de force*, and it is on this score that Arnold Bennett deserves his success.

"Bursley—tall chimneys and rounded ovens, schools, the new scarlet market, the great tower of the old church, the high spire of the evangelical church, the low spire of the church of genuflections, and the crimson chapels, and rows of little red houses with amber chimney-pots, and the gold angel of the blackened Town Hall topping the whole. The sedate reddish browns and reds of the composition, all netted in flowing scarves of smoke, harmonized exquisitely with the chill blues of the chequered sky. Beauty was achieved, and none saw it."

There are many passages of this kind in the work of Arnold Bennett, which demonstrate that he is no Philistine. Nor are his pictures of humanity lacking in grace and charm, all netted in smoke though they appear. But what he habitually sees is the dull greyness of the industrial scenes and the mercantile souls:

". . . Ragged brickwork, walls finished anyhow with saggars and clay; narrow uneven alleys leading to higgledy-piggledy workshops and kilns; cottages transformed into factories and factories into cottages . . . the reign of the slovenly makeshift, shameless, filthy and picturesque." (Cf. Harold Williams, *Modern English Writers.*)

In this sombre *milieu*, obscure dynasties have arisen and have destroyed other dynasties, quaint souls have

found their undelightful paradise and their Calvary in which there is no grandeur. Such is the realm of Arnold Bennett.

*The Old Wives' Tale* is the complete history of two sisters, from the beginning of their lives to the end. In the background the moving tableau of one of the Pottery villages unrolls itself through the years. Constance has her romance in marriage and remains faithful to her native *milieu*. Sophia quits the Five Towns, and has adventures in the Parisian *demi-monde* of the Second Empire. She lives in Paris during the siege, without knowing anything of it save what she is told in a family boarding-house, run by a *cocotte*, in which she lodges, which she is destined to buy, and from which she will make her fortune. The French are not flattered in this masterpiece. The two sisters end their lives together, in the same place where they began them. Everything around them has changed. In them nothing has changed save the exterior. Throughout their lives they have preserved a certain good sense, a solidity, an instinct for decency, order and propriety, that nothing has been able to disturb. Thus does Sophia skirt a thousand defilements without herself being defiled. She neither grows nor decreases. She is an Englishwoman, a provincial Englishwoman.

*Clayhanger* depicts a commercial and industrial family, just as *The Man of Property* and *The Country House* describe a family of landowners. But there are ideas in the books of John Galsworthy, while there are only facts in that of Arnold Bennett. Criticism and satire have no place in it, not even by implication.

Hilda Lessways is saved from catastrophe by the same

fundamental qualities that preserve Sophia from moral contagion. She is able to make a provincial and domestic success of her life with Edwin Clayhanger.

Do not say that beauty is absent from these dull paintings. No more than from the paintings of the Dutch and Flemish schools. There is no sunlight in them, that is all.

Arnold Bennett has said somewhere with justice that his work would not exist had he not felt and admired his models. And, in truth, he is an Englishman, and a provincial Englishman, behind his modern and cosmopolitan artist's front. Of the Potteries, he writes: "It seems to me the most English piece of England that I ever came across." And, in another place: "Obviously, whatever kind of life the novelist writes about, he has been charmed and seduced by it. He could have no other reason for writing about it." It may be a strange charm that no one has described before, but none the less charm.

If it were legitimate to ask from an author what he has neither wished nor been able to give, one might say that what Bennett lacks is not beauty but intelligence. This is a very big word. Heaven knows that nothing could surpass the comprehension and penetration of Arnold Bennett in his own field. One regrets only that this comprehension does not assume a certain order, that it stops at statements and furnishes no idea, reveals no vision of life.

A natural talent that is immense, and immensely ready; a certain coquetry of cynicism; a legitimate and perceptible straining toward success; an incontestable originality within a narrow frame—that, then, is Arnold Bennett, painter of the humble. Watching him pile de-

tail upon detail, fact upon fact, one sometimes asks for what reason this structure is being built, if he knows where he is going, if he is constructing a new city, or if, according to his own expression, he is simply perpetuating "the reign of the slovenly makeshift." At least none can contest the address and dexterity of his hands, nor deny that the walls are of real bricks, nor that there is pleasure in watching him work.

## IV

### *John Galsworthy*

If it were the purpose of this book to assign ranks and to pass judgments, here, probably, is the contemporary novelist who would make us pause and hold us longest. He is the most complete, the most solid, the best-balanced, perhaps the best writer, in the classical sense of the word, that England has produced for thirty years. If he were French, it is highly probable that he would, after some resistance and one or two interesting campaigns, have carried the Academic fortress by storm.

But my object is to *make known* rather than to *classify* the contemporary English novelists, and it happens that by the very virtue of his eminence John Galsworthy is not merely well known in France, but almost considered prematurely as a classic. It is less well known that he was, like all classics, a rebel at the outset.

An extremely well-educated and cultivated writer, a man of law and the son of a lawyer, who is familiar by education and by profession with the economic and moral life of the English middle class, who on various travels has encountered all that is freest and boldest that foreign lands can offer, decides at the age of about forty to state

in novel form what he knows and what he thinks of the civilization of his country. Again we come to the date 1904, already cited in connexion with James and Wells, Hewlett and Conrad, and Miss Sinclair. The Boer War has just ended. The weakness of England's arms, the fragility of her defence have become apparent. Minds are possessed by doubt. The formulas of Kipling are already superannuated, moribund. A complete dislocation of political balance is imminent. The forces of revolution are already in motion. Liberals, radicals and socialists, who have been deprived of power for thirty years, will not henceforward relinquish it. So much for the social and political worlds.

Among artists and novelists, the same causes, long at work, have produced analogous effects. Samuel Butler died in 1902, but his novel *The Way of All Flesh* has just been published in 1903, and in it is consumed all that the preceding generation had adored. Bernard Shaw, Butler's intellectual son, has just published *Man and Superman.* The taste for paradox and iconoclasm is in the air. The massacre has begun. A moral revolution is afoot. We cannot yet foresee the end. But it will be near at hand when someone, under some form or another, publishes the necessary defence of the Victorian Age, supplemented with the no less indispensable apology for lying, convention, and hypocrisy.

Meanwhile, and until the war, John Galsworthy, and with him twenty others simultaneously, gnaw at the sacks and tear the parchments.

Shelton, the hero of *The Island Pharisees,* has the innate taste for altruism. He has developed his critical genius in contact with Louis Ferrand, a Franco-Flammand Bohemian, a psychologist-tramp, discovered

at about the same time by Maurice Hewlett and William J. Locke. Shelton explores with heart and mind the society of his time. This society wishes to see neither the realities of life nor of sentiment. The whole virtue and the whole wisdom of its institutions are expended safe-guarding, possessing, enjoying. Good form is the sovereign good. To it intelligence and happiness are sacrificed, as in the case of Shelton's fiancée, who finds his mind dangerous, repulses him, and then takes him back again, knowing that she will be unhappy. In brief, she immolates herself on the principle which says that a "lady" shall never betray her word. Ferrand, a good chap but a coward, sponge and counsellor, keen-eyed and a spendthrift, amusing and improbable, serves as scarcely more than a paradox machine. The episode of Shelton in nocturnal converse with an old butler, on a bench in a public garden, recalls the comedies of Bernard Shaw.

*The Island Pharisees* was only a sentimental introduction. Here now are two types of the English citizen, two pillars of contemporary society: the man who *possesses*, in *The Man of Property* (1906), and the man who *resides*, in *The Country House* (1907). Soames Forsyte considers everything, even his wife, from the viewpoint of a proprietor. He has no other roots. He is at once possessing and possessed. All the members of the family, although subtly differentiated, gravitate around their sense of property. Old Jolyon makes use of money to strengthen the domestic bonds which hold him to existence. Young Bosinney, in love with art and beauty, is beaten by the power of money in the Forsyte girl whom he loves. Young Jolyon, who rebels against the ideal of his family while remaining faithful to it, writes, summing up the book:

"My people are not very extreme, and they have their private peculiarities, like every other family, but they possess in a remarkable degree those two qualities which are the real tests of a Forsyte—the power of never being able to give yourself up to anything soul and body, and the 'sense of property.' "

*The Country House* describes the landowner's life, so characteristic of nineteenth-century England. The crass ignorance of all that is not himself and his own domain, "an instinctive fear of seeing another's point of view, an instinctive belief in precedent," ends by embroiling old Pendyce with his wife, his son and his tenants. His son, equally stupid, ruins his life for a foolish and worthless woman; his fidelity is nothing but an obstinacy that turns to jealousy: always the sense of property. Mrs. Pendyce, who is not a Pendyce, saves the family from contempt and pity.

Under the ironic title of *Fraternity* (1909), Galsworthy depicts the efforts made by people of the same rank and class, in London, to communicate with their fellows. In the two preceding novels, the old theme of incompatibility of temperament in marriage was combined with social satire. Here the husband discovers that he cannot free himself from his family, even though he is attracted by a poor "little model." In the first place, she did not have clean nails. And then it is impossible to unite oneself with a human being born in another *milieu* without alienating oneself from one's own *milieu*. Hilary Dallison and his kind, with all their philanthropy, are incapable of fraternization.

*The Patrician* (1911) is not the aristocrat, but something less well defined, which is not appreciated, not being understood.

These four books comprise John Galsworthy's principal work. In another place he says of another section of his contemporaries what Wells has so often and so well expressed:

"They do things but they do them the wrong way! They muddle through with the greatest possible amount of unnecessary labour and suffering. It's part of the hereditary principle."

And Heaven knows that seems to be part of the artistic principle also, at least in certain forms of novels. "They do things but they do them the wrong way. They muddle through. . . ." It is somewhat after this fashion that the characters in *Fraternity*, *The Patrician*, and *The Dark Flower* (1913) are presented.[1] The latter is a trilogy rather than a novel. The sculptor, who is the hero of the book, marries the amiable Sylvia and returns to her constantly. He experiences the disillusion of love in the first part of his life, its tragedy in the second, and in the third part renounces happiness of the senses.

The Freeland brothers, in *The Freelands* (1915), represent the diverse forms of social tyranny which result from landowning in England. Felix believes in intellectual force, John in administrative force, Stanley in the power of industry. But the whole interest really centers in the vain revolt of Derek and Sheila against the Mallorings and their lives as great model landlords.

There is more life, more power, in *Beyond* (1917). The book enjoyed less success. Other matters then preoccupied the public. But as we re-read it, we realize that the author had never been closer to nature and to truth than in this depiction of elementary love, passion

1 Cf. Prof. Cunliffe, pp. 200–204.

and torment, in the heart and flesh of a woman who renews herself through suffering.

It is probably in his plays that John Galsworthy has best expressed his talent. But his short stories, and particularly the *Five Tales* (1918), yield nothing to his dramas in power of construction. *The Stoic* is one of the most powerful, by reason of the materialistic brutality of the *dénouement*. Galsworthy's rude, solid, tragic old men will stand as one of the revelations of this day.

This is the work of John Galsworthy. Its aspect is large and beautiful, it is vigorous, serious, solidly built. It places its author among the principal literary figures of contemporary England.

Perhaps he has seen the world too much through the veil of custom, law, and institutions. Yet the civil code and the penal code, social and collective tyrannies, trouble humanity much less than do the love and jealousy, the lucre and adventure that govern individuals.

In the case of John Galsworthy, as of many another, one would say that a man must turn savage or vagabond in order to preserve his manhood and love his fellow men. There is something of Sterne and of Rousseau in this literature—something, too, of Verlaine; Louis Ferrand attests their influence. And the already faded success of William J. Locke offers another testimony.

## V

## *Joseph Conrad*

In the year 1878, a young Ukrainian, bred in Poland, arrived at the little seaport of Lowestoft, where he was welcomed by the shade of Charles Dickens. Teodor

Jozef Konrad Korzeniowski was then twenty-one years of age. His father, a revolutionist of 1862, had been sent to prison and had died in 1870. His mother, exiled to Siberia, had succumbed in 1865. One of his uncles had seen to it that the boy received a substantial education. A passion for the sea and adventure had led him, at the age of nineteen, to Marseilles, where, already knowing French, he had shipped as a common sailor aboard a sailing-vessel. At Lowestoft he made the acquaintance of fishermen and coasters, learned English, studied navigation, obtained a mate's papers, then a captain's in the Merchant Marine, and made numerous voyages into the tropical seas of the Far East. During this solitary, wandering life, he wrote long descriptions and romantic fragments, for his own pleasure and with not the least idea of becoming a man of letters.

In 1894, following an attack of tropical fever, he left the sea and came to London. John Galsworthy, whom he had once met, aided him with his advice and his sympathy. His first book, *Almayer's Folly*, was accepted and published under the abridged name of Joseph Conrad. Behold the novelist. He was forty years old. Stevenson had just died. In English literature, and especially in the field of adventure fiction, there was a splendid place to be filled. It is more accurate to say that Joseph Conrad found himself thrust into it than that he took possession of it. For twenty years he has been one of the foremost writers of sea stories in England; but in a fashion quite different from that of his predecessors. And he is many other things besides.

A Slav by temperament, French by education and by habit of mind, English by choice and by habit of life, his advent marked a new stage of cosmopolitanism in con-

temporary English literature. The Greeks, and after them the Barbarians, penetrated Rome while she was conquering them. No great nation can become a colonizer without herself being colonized; and all imperialism, even when merely economic, is won at an intellectual price. Even so does a river which overflows lose the colour of its waters, while taking on that of the clay, sand, and metal dust which it tears from its banks.

The case of Joseph Conrad, Ukrainian or Pole, who was ignorant of English when he was twenty, who had produced nothing when he was forty, and who at sixty finds himself one of the undisputed masters of the English novel, is all the more symptomatic in that it promises not to be unique. With him it is no longer simply a case of artistic and intellectual cosmopolitanism, achieved through the cultivated classes. Joseph Conrad entered English life and literature not by way of the gangplank, but through the forecastle, as a common seaman. His is the career of an emigrant. He had penetrated and conquered the English novel of adventure through facts, through his own life, before establishing himself in it and exercising an influence that is the more remarkable because it owes everything to talent and nothing to the artifices of commercial skill. Some thirty years ago old European England was asking itself if the young England of America would be capable of assimilating the troubled deposits of immigration. To-day London is confronted by the same question that New York has faced for fifty years.

Scarcely had he commenced to write, when Joseph Conrad formulated his theory of art and of the novel in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1898). This manifesto answers to the need of logic which he had

acquired from his French culture, but at the same time it satisfies the Slavic instinct for imprecision. What is new in it is not always clear, and what seems clear is not always new. No matter. Joseph Conrad repudiates philosophy and science as the guides of invention, and consequently forswears all books with a thesis: "But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and, therefore, more permanently enduring." Thus does he separate himself from the majority of the great English novelists of the nineteenth century. And, indeed, there is in his work no general idea, no claim, doctrine, protestation or social satire, no political or religious "tendency." His characters are what they are, distinct, varied, profoundly individual; but they form no basis for possible generalization. He creates men, not types. He abstains from all that might seem praise or blame. With Conrad we are a thousand leagues from Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and all the contemporary English authors who, directly or indirectly, intervene in their narratives. Nor are we closer to the realists who serve up a slice of life with the same indifference that an innkeeper serves up a slice of veal. On the contrary, his doctrine, his genius, and his practice lead him to imprint the most intense personality upon pages that are apparently the most impersonal. For him the artist is a temperament who speaks to other temperaments by "the magic of suggestion," imposes himself on them not directly but by a constant evocation, and enthralls them not by power of reason or sentiment, but by force of the vital instinct.

"He speaks," says Conrad, "to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding

our lives: to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain: to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation. . . ."

Joseph Conrad, then, is neither moral nor social, as are the majority of the great English novelists, nor indifferent and detached, as are the very great French writers who are spectators and interpreters of life rather than collaborators with it. His kind of realism is more akin to that of the Primitives and the Russians.

No writer of our time, perhaps, is gifted with a power of moral and mental dissection superior to that displayed by Joseph Conrad. None succeeds better in hiding the mechanism and revealing only the effect. His psychological capacity is intense, but it finds expression only in results. He spares the reader the cumbersome and vain analytical apparatus that is senselessly exhibited by so many would-be psychologists. He does not say of his characters: "This is what they think and feel." We know their thoughts and emotions because they live before us, in full relief.

"All art, therefore," says Joseph Conrad, "appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music—which is the art of arts."

The evidence of the senses, the appeal to the senses, are, then, according to Joseph Conrad, the secret of his art and of his talent. And this is indeed what is most striking in his work.

"My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the

power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask."

For Joseph Conrad, then, sensation is the artistic medium *par excellence*. As to the moral and ethnic object of his work, he does not find it in the battle of the classes as do the social novelists, nor in the battle of races and of peoples as do the imperialistic and nationalistic novelists, but in "the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."

It would have been enough for Joseph Conrad to proclaim this sense of interracial solidarity, at the very time when Kipling was winning his triumph, for him to be distinguished from his contemporaries among the novelists of exoticism and adventure.

The appeal to the senses as an artistic medium, the appeal to human solidarity as a moral object, the proscription of idea, of thesis, of commentary, of intentional emotion—these, then, according to Joseph Conrad, are the characteristics of his work. Few authors, save Corneille, have seen themselves more accurately or defined themselves better in advance. Of late, Conrad has broadened his domain, relaxed his formulas, and for some years now he seems to have abandoned the rigour of his

primitive conceptions. But the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* explains all of his books that preceded the war.

In Conrad's work, one encounters first of all four great adventure novels. In them the South Seas and the Malayan Archipelago are evoked with incomparable splendour and power. Were it only for their descriptive beauty, these books would deserve to live. In a volume of short stories belonging to the same cycle, *Typhoon*, a masterpiece, marks the maximum that literary art can achieve in sensation.

Just as the typhoon found its master in the obstinate, obtuse, epic character of Captain MacWhirr, so has the rage of the ocean, thanks to Joseph Conrad, ceased to "defy all description." He has noted down, translated, made us hear and made us *see* what the worst of storms can do at its worst.

On these deserted, shining seas, in these fiercely lighted and perfumed isles, men cast aside by mankind, through fault or fate, live out their solitude or punishment. All are victims of lucre and cupidity. None is entirely contemptible.

*Almayer's Folly* describes the degradation of a white man who has married a savage. In *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), the thief and traitor is punished by the savage nature of Borneo. In *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1898), the dying man who finally does not die provokes at once mutiny and solidarity in an unforgettable crew. In *Lord Jim* (1900), the temporary cowardice of a man drives him for ever farther from justice and civilization.

In 1904 Conrad abandoned the sea, and *Nostromo* de-

scribes an imaginary South American republic in which all human passions, concentrated and overheated by the modern fever for quickly gotten wealth, seem to have been given a rendezvous. It is an epic of exotic civilizations. *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) relate the adventures of anarchists and revolutionists.

It is following this period that Joseph Conrad seemed to renovate not the manner but the material of his art. The symbolism of the characters is accentuated. At the same time the interest shifts. Until then the appeal to human solidarity (unexpressed but eloquent, emanating not from the author but from the facts and circumstances of the narrative) had been exercised only in favour of victims of the great social malfeasance, cupidity. Now it continues to be at once mute and piercing, but it is addressed less to the victims than to the saviours, to the rebels, the reformers, conquered by fact but triumphant in spirit. In addition, the malediction is personified: the genius of lucre, of misfortune, of revenge, is incarnated in satanic and miserable characters. Such is the old de Barral, in *Chance* (1914), who is led to prison by his financial ambition and who comes out of it stuffed with murderous thoughts as a mine is stuffed with explosives. Such, in *Victory* (1915), is the horrible Jones, who is the most modern and most plausible incarnation of the Evil One. Confronted by this diabolical creation, Axel Heist and Lena, although conquered by destiny, win plenitude of life in dying one by the other and one for the other. It is in this that Victory consists. The book, written between 1914 and 1915, may perhaps have had a still broader significance.

Meanwhile Conrad's style has been divesting itself of, losing, that excess of sensual wealth which distinguished his first books.

*The Shadow-Line,* one of Conrad's latest novels, is perhaps the most nearly perfect after *The Nigger of the Narcissus;* it was published under the sub-title "A Confession." It is the story of a young captain who is led by circumstances to assume command of a sailing-ship that is inexplicably detained in the Siamese river. By force of persistence and will-power he takes it out into the bay, a desolate region of great calms, and there for some weeks, with a crew wasted by fever, he vainly tries to clear the latitude where the invisible corpse of the preceding captain seems to forbid his passage. The living man finally conquers the dead man. The shadow-line is finally passed by the young man, despite the old man, at the price of his illusions and his happiness. Not a word of the sinister machinations that have almost caused the ship to be lost; not a word of the symbolism that lurks behind this battle of redemption. But all this, although unexpressed, is clear to the intuitive and cultivated reader. Joseph Conrad does not write for the crowd, and he has never had more than a narrow circle of readers.

He is none the less one of the great contemporary novelists of England, which is not to say that he is a great *English* novelist. His talent allies him to every age, just as his origin and his career ally him to all countries, his intention and his work to all men and all peoples. More of an artist than most of his British contemporaries, one thing has perhaps been lacking for his complete self-realization: freedom from the necessity of writing in order to live, while he has lived in order to

write. While reading him one regrets that he has felt obliged to mix so much of the feuilleton in his novels.

Perhaps, too, he has lacked in his youth and his maturity the privilege of a sufficiently complete experience of civilized humanity to give to the picture that he has attempted to paint the profound fidelity that his talent promised. The tragic muteness of his feminine types, for example, is not devoid of grandeur, force, and novelty. But is their silence a mark of power or impotence in the author? The women of Joseph Conrad are passionate enigmas, but still enigmas like La Gioconda, though for another reason. Their mystery is born of the rictus, not the smile. The science of drawing is sufficient for the one, the other requires the science of modelling. In the same way, the frequent use of indirect narrative may be evidence of a literary conscience in an author who desires to efface himself; but does not Joseph Conrad abuse this method, as in *Chance*, for example, where he interposes Marlowe and makes him recount what other characters have said to their friends? This manner of conducting the narrative appears most difficult. But may not the difficult art, by chance, be an evasion of the more difficult art of simplicity? The direct method of *Typhoon* seems preferable; and Joseph Conrad has returned to it in his recent books.

His task was not yet ended when the above was written, nor had he finished his development. But the work that he had already produced placed him in the very first rank of contemporary novelists, and in one of the foremost ranks among writers.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE WOMEN NOVELISTS FROM GEORGE ELIOT TO THE WAR

### I

### *The Popular Women Novelists*

I HAVE already remarked on the fervour with which English women, toward the end of the Victorian Age, joined in the movement of emancipation and universal revolution which was taking place in the world of manners before reaching the world of institutions. Since then they have achieved the principal objects of that enthusiastic, spontaneous, disinterested campaign, which was distinguished by innumerable sacrifices. Divorce has been made easier. Woman has become freer in marriage, and outside it. Opinion supports and even approves feminine independence in all its forms. Pleasure and sympathy are now almost the only instruments with which education is familiar. And, finally, women vote.

It does not appear that they are happier, nor that they disseminate more happiness, for all this. Perhaps they have made themselves more useful, if utility is to be measured by capacity. Whatever the result of their crusade, the novel has been shaped to its purposes for a whole generation.

The betrayed woman who revenges herself, the misunderstood woman who dies, the woman who believes and

who none the less revolts, woman oppressed morally and economically, woman the equal of man, woman responsible for education—these are some of the themes that the feminine novelists have handled with tireless persistence and talent during the first years of the twentieth century. Never before, perhaps, has the thesis novel enjoyed such a vogue. It must be admitted that a part of its success has been due to the depiction, quite as much as to the criticism, of the physiological and psychological "cases" on which this type of novel has fed. Under cover of the crusade, many excursions have been made into hitherto forbidden fields. The English novel, the feminine novel, has profited rather than suffered from this unconscious deceit. It has had licence to study, for good motives, the same situations that the naturalists exposed with no other object than exposing them. Many women authors have thus created works of art without offending Mrs. Grundy, and hypocrisy has been defeated by its own weapons.

It was in 1888 that Sarah Grand (Mrs. Frances Elisabeth MacFall) published *Ideala*, the manifesto and model of the new genre. An eccentric and original young woman is ill mated, and her husband is unfaithful to her. She is about to leave him, to go off with a lover, when she realizes that others, less excusable than herself, would use her example as a precedent. In *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), the escapades of two terrible twins serve as a frame for the story of the unfortunate Evadne who, after marriage, discovers her husband's past and refuses to live with him. The humour is of the first order, and saves from oblivion the rest of the book which is surcharged with incidents and dissertations. We find the

same complications, the same redeeming virtue of humour, that is to say the same fundamental human sympathy and understanding, in *Babs the Impossible* (1901), whose heroine resembles the young girls of Gyp. Ideala, Babs, and Evadne are creations of the intelligence rather than creatures of reality. Sarah Grand has shown herself as a more faithful and more humble observer in *Adam's Orchard*, published later in 1912. Everywhere she is possessed of the same sincerity, the same intensity of conviction. Her novels are neither composed nor written; they are thought and felt. And she has the gift of humour, which makes up for many another.

John Oliver Hobbes (Mrs. Craigie), who died at the age of thirty-nine in 1906, had other strings to her bow. Born in America, mingling in the fashionable life of London, author or victim of one of those matrimonial tragedies which have overturned so many lives, she turned, troubled by contradictory aspirations, from paganism to puritanism, and ended by taking refuge in Catholicism. In her books she displays a rare wealth of emotion and experience. The superficial cynicism and the imaginative fantasy with which she knew how to clothe the realism and didactic intention of her first novels, were responsible for the attraction of *Some Emotions and a Moral*, which enjoyed a great success in 1891, and *The Gods, Some Mortals, and Lord Wickenham*, which appeared in 1895. These books reveal the secret tenderness of a tormented soul to all who know how to read. The idealized character of Disraeli dominates *The School for Saints* (1897) and *Robert Orange* (1900). There is in this life and in these books a melancholy that outlives their success.

Lucas Malet (Mrs. Mary St. Leger Harrison) has also consecrated the greater part of her talent to the emancipation of women and the problem of marriage. But she has seen too much, read too much, travelled too widely, inherited too much from her father, Charles Kingsley, to limit herself to this field. Let us leave aside the idylls such as *Little Peter* (1888), the comedies such as *The Carissima*, the "psychic mysteries" such as *The Gateless Barrier* (1900). Three books of unequal value will suffice to win her a lasting fame.

*The Wages of Sin* (1891) established her talent. It is a social history comprised in an individual life. Man imagines that he may cut his life into independent slices, "sow his wild oats" or take "a holiday," according to his age, and return to find the natural curve of his life and character intact. But there is no moral or artistic deterioration that does not carry with it its own punishment. On this theme one might write an insupportable homily or a vigorous and true book, according to the temperament that one brought to the task. Lucas Malet put into *The Wages of Sin* a tragic intensity, an analytical power, a clarity of form that explain her first great success.

*The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901) was no less popular. This story of an infirm nobleman, of his loves and his excesses, with the lesson that it carries, is not without nobility. It is probable that the sensual passages in the book served in no way to detract from its fame.

*Adrian Savage* (1911) describes the life of a man of letters, half French, half English, which unfolds itself in Paris and the south of England. All the problems of our age—politics, morality, sex relations, art and religion

—are here approached in the feminist spirit. This sociological vegetation would have stifled the human interest and produced a hybrid work, similar to some of the would-be novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward, had Lucas Malet been possessed of less natural temperament and native power. Like Wells, though for other reasons, she succeeds in communicating movement and a certain intellectual life to mountains of abstractions. In her latest books she seems to be busy fashioning a style after Meredith, and striking an attitude before posterity. Her first book, *Mrs. Lorimer* (1882), written without pretensions, with vigour and clean strokes, gave a better idea of her talent as an artist.

If mine were the ambitious project of paying homage in a few lines to the principal English women novelists of the contemporary period, I should have to mention Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler (Mrs. Alfred Felkin), who recalls Jane Austen; Lady Ritchie, the daughter of Thackeray; Mrs. M. L. Woods, a tragic poet strayed into the novel; the Countess d'Armin and her interesting silhouettes of German life; John Strange Winter, her soldiers, her officers and her garrisons, who wrote *Bootle's Baby* in 1885, and sold two million copies of it in ten years; Mrs. W. K. Clifford, creator of a type, *Aunt Anne* (1892), who is the "Mère Goriot" of the English novel; Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick and Miss Ethel Sidgwick, whose talent is in full bloom; Iota (Miss Cathleen Caffyn), so fertile in ideas that she has furnished them ready-made for many a more celebrated novelist—for example, the growth of love through maternity, and the morbid effect of religious sentiment in the education of children; and finally Elizabeth Robins (Mrs. George Richmond Parks),

American by birth like John Oliver Hobbes, a famous actress and interpreter of Ibsen, who, having turned novelist, began by writing real novels, such as *The Magnetic North*, and ended by writing lectures, homilies, and romantic diatribes such as *The Convert*.

Miss Beatrice Harraden, a quite opposite type, has won hearts by gentleness, sentiment and pity, but she has been unable to repeat the success of her first book, *Ships That Pass in the Night*, although *The Guiding Thread* is not inferior.

Popular verdict and the consecration of fashion would oblige me, were completeness necessary, to recall here the lucubrations of Ouida, who is not yet forgotten in France; the melodramatic narratives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon (Mrs. John Maxwell); and, finally, the astonishing, the singular fortune of Marie Corelli. If there is one of her books that deserves better than the others the marvellous success that they have obtained, it is probably *Temporal Power* (1902).

A veritable torrent of popularity overwhelmed her at the appearance of her first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886). For a generation, Miss Marie Corelli has occupied the popular ground floor, and Mrs. Humphry Ward the nobler first floor, of a moral edifice analogous to the big department stores. Crowds have passed into this building seeking what seemed to them the latest thing among the accessories of the religious toilet. Mrs. Humphry Ward's culture, dignity, and admirable conscience have defended her against the deleterious effects of certain admirations, of suspect enthusiasms. But if one wishes to discern whence they have led certain other less well armed feminine novelists, one may turn back to Leonard Merrick's *Cynthia*, one of the most

agreeable novels that this excellent story-teller has written; and those who are interested in the literary manners of literary England will not find their time wasted. In addition, they will be privileged to make the acquaintance of a book which, while not recalling any model, is a little masterpiece, and an author who, while belonging to no school, is none the less one of the best novelists of England to-day.

How preferable to the great success-machines of Marie Corelli are the sincere, modest, courageous fictions that a host of talented women are writing in their families, in their counties! Doubtless they do not escape from the influences, the preoccupations of the moment. None among them will know great glory. Their memories will go to join those of the anonymous Jane Austens and unknown George Eliots that England never ceases to produce. Yet it is these numerous little-known feminine novelists who cultivate and maintain the magnificent garden of imagination in the British people. The Irish tales of Miss Jane Barlow and of Katherine Tynan (Mrs. Hinkson), the charming narratives of Miss Edith Somerville and Miss Violet Martin,[1] the Scottish novels of the Misses Findlater, and, closer to us, the powerful evocations of peasant life in the south of England, of which Mrs. Dudeney is the author, would suffice to illustrate a minor literature.

*The House of Many Mirrors,* by Violet Hunt; *Good Old Anna,* by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes; Berta Ruck's amusing *Bridge of Kisses;* and even the *Iron Stair,* by Rita, may give the French reader an idea of the infinite variety, of the sometimes remarkable talent, that their authors

[1] The common pseudonym of Edith Somerville and Martin Ross. I prefer their *Real Charlotte* to *Adventures of an Irish R.M.*

bring into play. J. E. Buckrose (Mrs. Falconer Jameson) depicts in *The Roundabout*, and in many another novel of East Yorkshire, a provincial life quite as interesting as that of Mr. Arnold Bennett's Five Towns. She brings to her task a feeling for local history, a penetration of feminine character, and a lively perception of the effects of evolution upon the generations of a single family and upon the social strata of a single city.

I am perfectly aware of all the reproaches that may be brought against this feminine literature, so often prolix and sometimes puerile. But one is confounded in contemplation of its abundance and its fidelity, and, all in all, one admires the high level at which such a mass of fiction can maintain itself.

Not all these women novelists have been to the same degree emancipators and revolutionists. But there is in all of them, and this is what distinguishes them from their predecessors, an acute feeling for renovation, and a more or less restrained impatience with the social conditions bequeathed to the twentieth century by the nineteenth. When this wave of claims and recriminations had spread itself out, divided, and disappeared, after having dissolved mountains of sand and vainly beaten against certain rocks; when, exhausted by its numerous successes and calmed by some checks, it had lost something of its noisy force, the time was propitious for feminine studies less charged with the polemical spirit. A return to what is elementary and eternal in the rôle and nature of woman would have then been possible. The ground was cleared, the state of opinion and manners permitted greater frankness in the depiction and discussion of many a yet unexplored question. After the power-sick suffragettes,

there might have been heard the voices of simple women, love-sick or money-sick, tormented by their sex and their conscience, ignorant and hesitant when confronted by maternity and the work without pay or the pay without work so frequently resultant from marriage. But the war was near at hand, and its great voice was destined to drown all others.

Yet some women novelists have made us hear this new note in feminine fiction. The most remarkable of them is Miss May Sinclair.

## II

### *Miss May Sinclair*

About 1904, Miss May Sinclair achieved celebrity by the publication of *The Divine Fire*, which enjoyed a great success in the United States. Her advent coincided with the general transformation of the novel (already noted several times, in connexion with Henry James, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad and Maurice Hewlett) which was then being accomplished. Never had England witnessed such a political collapse as that which followed the Boer War, when all the forces of radicalism were once again unchained. The moulting of the novel at this time was an analogous phenomenon, and not simply a coincidence.

When one reads Miss May Sinclair's books successively, what strikes one at first is the predominance in the principal characters (almost all feminine) of what is most elementary in nature: the physical instinct of love. They are all haunted by it. It is an obession: The Divine Fire is also the human fire, which consumes while it purifies.

There is no shadow of brutality or sensuality, still less, be it understood, is there any obscenity or conscious or unhealthy excitation in these sometimes burning pages. But the eternal voice of sex sounds through them all without respite. A long, slow clamour emanates from them, telling of the human being's blind aspiration toward love, his catastrophes, his punishments, his illusions and his disillusions. Since Jane Eyre, no woman has more completely expressed the instinct of woman.[1]

If there is one woman novelist of our day who is seemingly dedicated to interpret anew the Brontë sisters, it is assuredly Miss May Sinclair. In a considerable portion of her work, she combines and blends the principal traits of the characters of Charlotte and Emily. She continues the inspiration of their work; with the freedom of a freer day, in the light of a more advanced knowledge of the soul and body, she completes it and refines upon its execution. She knows, in particular, the gamut of hysteria, and one is sure, only by reading certain of her books, that she is acquainted with modern psychiatry and thoroughly familiar with nervous disorders.

It is not imitation, but the spontaneous meeting of two kinds of temperament, that links her to the Brontë sisters. In the novel which I consider her masterpiece, *The Three Sisters*, it happens that the external circum-

1 Miss May Sinclair has written an excellent book on the Brontë sisters, in which she defends them for having expressed the passion of cultivated and unsatisfied women in love. In places one seems to hear the voice of the special pleader. Miss May Sinclair has no need to justify herself. Whoever has read her work attentively knows, beyond doubt, that there is in her feminine characters, as in those of the Brontë sisters, much more and much else than this intellectualized pruriency.

stances recall the parish of Haworth. There is here only a pure coincidence, that has no connexion with the drama, but it adds to the interest of this remarkable book. What would have happened had an eligible young man presented himself to the Brontë sisters remaining secluded at Haworth? What if the three sisters were all infatuated with him?

The minister Carteret has killed his first wife by a succession of incautious childbirths. His second wife has left him because she was suffocating in the atmosphere of pious egotism that he breathes. His youngest daughter Alice has, through ignorance (and innocence), made the already unsettled situation of the minister impossible. She has run after love, and the lover has hidden from her. In consequence, Carteret, with his three girls, has left his important parish in the south and abandoned his hopes of quick advancement. He has taken refuge in an obscure northern parish, on the outskirts of a straggling village, on the edge of heaths and hills, out of touch with the gentry who know his history. It is there that the three sisters are to meet their fate.

They are equally the victims of instinct, of the physical need of loving. Miss May Sinclair is not among those English women novelists who conceal the existence of such a thing. Mary, placid, waits. Alice, impulsive, is subject to disquieting disturbances of mental and physical health. Eleanor's temperament is no less vigorous, but it is allied to an imagination, an artist's intelligence, and a true woman's heart. She is a natural masterpiece set between two works of nature.

The three sisters, one mature, another a child, seem condemned to celibacy, when a young doctor comes to

establish himself in the neighbourhood. He is the one possible husband, and they are three. . . .

Alice offers herself to the doctor, but feels that Eleanor is preferred, and she goes from prostration to exaltation towards death or misconduct. Eleanor, after having acquired the conviction that she is loved and is going to be loved, avoids the avowal and goes away so that Alice may find salvation in marriage. Mary holds back, remains passive; but the revelation of her character is only the more dramatic for this. The father, who is blind when he thinks himself keen, a tyrant ignorant of himself, unconsciously precipitates the catastrophe by rendering Alice's existence intolerable. She has made the acquaintance of a neighbouring young lout, foul-mouthed and of bad repute, who has made the parish-house servant a mother. He is a specimen of those northern Celts, extreme in temperament, who people contemporary fiction with their mysterious violence. Sensual, given to alcoholism, superstitious and pathetic, he can be led by passion to all depths and heights. Alice is attracted to him and gradually subjugated. Meantime Mary, with the slowness and fatality of quicksand, gathers in the young doctor. It is not premeditated treason, but rather the scarcely conscious, scarcely desired operation of physical fatality: a white neck which bends at the right moment. . . . It resembles a natural phenomenon, insensible, inexorable, irreparable. Mary triumphs. The marriage is settled upon.

About the same time, Alice succumbs. The rustic lover leads her to his farm-house, and there he takes her. After that they love in secret. She is happy, born anew. But the secret of their love becomes known. When

Eleanor returns for Mary's marriage, the house is in upheaval. Carteret attempts to forbid Alice's marriage, and to drive her out as he dismissed the large-hearted servant, the unrancorous victim of the same instinct, mistress before her mistress of the same man. Mary overwhelms her sister. Alice, half mad, accuses Carteret, accuses Mary, denounces their egotism, their own sensuality. Upheld by Eleanor, she finally pierces Carteret's moral carapace. He is stricken by paralysis. Alice marries her lover, and saves him from drink and madness. She is saved from a still worse fate by marriage and maternity.

Eleanor, the sole guardian, installs herself with the feeble-minded father and cares for him. She would consume herself in her thankless task, without the renascent love which sustains it. Her brother-in-law desires her, and she loves him. More than once she is upon the point of surrender, but she defends herself against herself and against him. The years pass by. Mary grows old and collaborates with time. With a cruelty that is unpremeditated, but not unconscious—that of the female who occupies, furnishes, and defends her nest—she keeps Eleanor away from her home and her *milieu*. She installs her husband in comfort and satisfied vanity, surrounds him with quiet, and finally equips him with a cuirass of moral padding.

Dedicated to the fate of an old maid, and feeling that life has escaped her, finally conquered by her sex, Eleanor, who has resisted so long, is brought at last to supplication. She asks her brother-in-law to spare her, and to go away in his turn. He makes her understand that he is no longer tempted, that the danger has passed. The man whom she

loved is dead in a cataplasm of base domestic satisfaction. Humiliated, cast down by this fall, Eleanor takes up her life again with the vain bauble of her virginity, the vain consolation of her mysticism.

Is the predominance of carnal love discernible through the dryness of this analysis? There are a thousand other things in *Three Sisters:* realism of depiction, idealism of intention, influence of heredity and of temperament; bitter criticism of the conventions which, had they been respected, would have led to the degradation of Alice; apology for the instinct and logic of life which saves two human beings by their very sins; and, finally, the irreducible opposition of generations. One feels that Samuel Butler has passed this way. In contemporary fiction there is no longer a self-respecting novel in which the father is not detestable and abhorred.

The true subject of the drama is not only the battle for the husband; it is the calm ferocity of instinct in Mary, its beauty in Eleanor, and its violent weakness in Alice. In this familiar setting, what a tragedy is this merciless competition for love and marriage! Here again Samuel Butler and Bernard Shaw have passed: it is the woman who is the aggressor.

There are long stretches in this novel, there are digressions, and sometimes rhetoric. But it is none the less admirable for its unity. The unique motivating power of all these human beings is the very one which assures the continuity of the race. It appears again, breeding disaster, in *Kitty Tailleur* and *The Creators* and *The Helpmate* and *The Judgment of Eve*. *The Helpmate* accuses the wife, and *The Judgment of Eve* accuses the husband. In *The Combined Maze*, Miss May Sinclair studies sexual

relations as found among commonplace and unintelligent popular young athletes, who defend their virtue by the exercise of their muscles. Like H. G. Wells, she points out what is mysterious, droll and fantastic in these naked and absurd souls. Like him, she emphasizes the ridiculous unconsciousness and hazardous ignorance which presides at marriage. Others will go further (Hugh de Sélincourt, for example, in *Realms of Day*) and plead bodily health, legitimacy of trial, free alliance before the sacrament. Ah, how far we are from the age of Victoria! Who knows, even, if we are not very near to regretting it?

Miss Sinclair seems to suspect such a regret. Her latest books witness a sensible change of manner. She has discovered other fields and other types in which the instinct of action, the desire for production, supersedes that of reproduction. The style of these books is renovated, rejuvenated. Her first novels were written in a quasi-prophetic language, and there still remained something ecstatic in those that followed. The latest are infinitely more direct.

In *Tasker Jevons*, she has come upon a modern type of writer that makes one think of Dickens, Wells, Arnold Bennett. Sprung from the lowest social regions, he ostentatiously succeeds in all that he undertakes, and he insolently undertakes all that tempts him or defies him. He is a volcano of energy. In him an innate puffery is allied to generosity, and even to sensibility and the most exquisite simplicity. Unwittingly he compromises, before marriage, a young girl who belongs to that deliciously, absurdly archaic middle class which flourishes in the shadow of provincial cathedrals. Neither the success of his work, nor the manifest beauty of his character, can efface the taint of birth which his manners still reveal.

He can conquer his new family only by the supreme proof, a silent sacrifice of himself.

One finds these characters who are drawn on a bigger scale, and more distinct than life, in many novels of recent years. The extraordinary character is again in fashion. His career is described with an exactitude, a wealth of details and dates, a precision regarding money matters, for instance, for which Samuel Butler has given the precept and the example. It is romanticism with the methods of realism. Miss May Sinclair has attempted it in *Tasker Jevons*, which is one of the most curious, most living books that one can imagine, despite the prolixity of the narrative. What English woman novelist will ever learn to compose?

*Tasker Jevons* clearly marks a turning in the literary development of Miss May Sinclair. Despite her deplorable abundance, she is, it seems, the most representative woman novelist of contemporary England. If new evidence of this were required, it could be found in *Mary Olivier*, published in 1919, which is not far from equalling *The Three Sisters* in power and interest. It is again the physio-psychological story of one of those "normally tainted" families that Miss May Sinclair has persistently unveiled for us in healthy England.

As a matter of fact, one doubts that the mental and moral health of the middle classes among our neighbours is either better or worse than elsewhere. But no one, in the British novel, has done the work of dissection that Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant and their disciples accomplished in France towards the close of the last century. With more real knowledge and less brutality, Miss May Sinclair, bending tenderly over the body and heart of the modern woman, knows how to reveal the weakness of her

sex without killing our respect for it, knows how to reveal the powerful human force without doing violence to a single feminine charm. In *Mary Olivier*, for example, she follows the career of an affectionate, educated girl through the morbid lives of her middle-class family. Mary is saved by intelligence, by sincerity. She does not find happiness, at least not where she sought it. It comes to her only with renunciation and disillusion, when she has passed the age of love. There are moments in which she appears an insupportable bluestocking, others when the generous and genial eccentric disappears to give place to a child, a young girl, an adorable woman. Through the four hundred pages of autobiography in *Mary Olivier*, Miss May Sinclair proceeds by short notations. It is impressionism, *pointillisme*, but it is at the service of an almost epic imagination.

The integral life of Mary in her completeness—her intellectual, emotional, family, amorous, tragic life—is written down in this book, from her infancy to her maturity, set in the midst of the precise and detailed lives of her whole family. The book is all in paragraphs. The brevity of each moment in this vast ensemble serves to emphasize its immensity. The tone, sometimes apocalyptic, adds to this impression. In *Mary Olivier* there is material for ten novels. One is a little bewildered by this abundance; but it is impossible not to respect and admire such a talent.

What is lacking? The very thing that the English novel, and I would almost say the English artistic temperament, lacks. Miss Sinclair well knows what it is, she who makes Richard Nickolson, the English critic, say: "We're a proud island people, held in too tight, held in till we burst. That's why we've no æsthetic restraint.

No restraint of any sort.[1] Take our economics. Take our politics. We've had to colonize, to burst out over continents. When our minds begin moving it's the same thing. They burst out. All over the place. . . . When we've learned restraint we shall take our place inside Europe, not outside it."

[1] Miss May Sinclair has since given a model of artistic restraint and brevity in *The Life and Death of Harriet Frean*.—A. C.

## CHAPTER X

## THE YOUNGER GENERATION

### I

### *Still Another Evolution*

The novelists whom we have so far studied in these pages will occupy, happen what may, a place in the literary history of England. Some of them, Kipling and Galsworthy for example, will hold even a great place. Yet, despite the fact that they are still vigorously producing, their literary influence has already ceased to be an active and a present force. For a decade now, other writers, other models, and other ideas have been imposing themselves upon the public taste.

It is assuredly difficult to discern among the younger novelists those who will enjoy twenty years from now the favour that was accorded their first books. Some among them will rapidly exhaust their success. Anyone who had studied the contemporary novel in England seven or eight years ago could not have refrained from pointing out Mr. E. M. Forster as one of the authors best assured of occupying a foremost place to-day among the writers of his genre. But he seems to have run dry.[1] So, too, it is possible that authors as yet unpublished

[1] He has since resumed with great success his literary activity.—A C.

or unknown will leap into the first rank of their profession at a stride. William de Morgan was sixty years old when he began to write and to publish. Samuel Butler was dead and buried when his one novel saw the light of day.

One cannot, then, surround oneself with too many precautions when one attempts to discern among the younger British writers those who will represent the English novel in the eyes of their generation. The indications of criticism are not reliable in this matter, for friendship, coteries, and fashion, to say nothing of personal interest, play a great rôle in the development of youthful reputations in every age. Whatever the authority of the great reviews and influential journals, their verdict is never beyond appeal. The judgment of authors themselves regarding their peers would be more eloquent were it possible to obtain it with certainty.

Two elements of appreciation remain. First, success, which is a fact. I mean literary success as demonstrated by a quasi-unanimity among the critics and an authentic circulation in cultivated circles. By this title, Messrs. Hugh Walpole, Compton Mackenzie (and, to a lesser degree, Temple Thurston), W. B. Maxwell, and Stephen McKenna may be mentioned first. Afterward, in default of evident success or the unanimity of criticism, we may be guided by a certain consensus of opinion among the authors themselves and among the most enlightened and best-qualified representatives of the public. By this title, Messrs. J. D. Beresford, Gilbert Cannan, Frank Swinnerton, Oliver Onions, and D. H. Lawrence merit the attention of the French public. There should, perhaps, be added to this list the names of Alec Waugh, Stacy Aumonier, James Joyce, J. E. Agate; and, among the

women, Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, Miss Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Clemence Dane, Mrs. Virginia Woolf, Miss Romer Wilson, Miss Rose Macaulay, and Miss Rebecca West.

Of course, one does not expect that one can possibly discover in these authors a common character, or even a group of analogous traits which will serve to distinguish them from their forerunners. There is no more a common measure among them, no more unity or resemblance, than among their immediate predecessors. The most that one can dare is to indicate certain tendencies that are found in their books.

First of all, it is patent that, following the influence of Flaubert and Maupassant—continuously operative during the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries—the influence of the Russian writers, and notably Dostoievski, has made a powerful impression upon these novelists before, during, and since the war. Russia has been the object of a veritable literary fashion. None could aspire to the rank of intellectual and to the epithet "advanced" without a veneer of revolutionary Slavism. There were few literary novels between 1912 and 1918 that were not strongly marked by this Russian influence. During this period no book was more read in England than *The Brothers Karamazov.* The exiguous portion of the English public that prides itself on literature was permeated with a *mélange* of mysticism and sensuality, violence and love, a kind of intellectual sadism.

The religious instinct of the race, never absent despite the appearances of irreligion, appeared for a time deformed. In the beautiful Dublin Museum (where James Stephens was then working) I once saw a "Christ Saying

Farewell to His Mother" by Gerhardt David. With bare feet upon a pavement of grey, yellow and white, sparse hair, long robe of bluish green, the Saviour of men, as represented by this Flemish primitive, has the features of a Russian revolutionary and saint who is at the same time a worker of miracles. Bulging forehead, protruding eyes, jutting cheekbones, sculptured, repugnant and engaging lips, elongated lower face, fine blond and foamy beard, eyes full of dreams and madness—here is the Slavic Redeemer, mixture of Rasputin and St. Francis, to whose equivocal inspiration, one might believe, English literature for some years submitted. But for a few years only. Epstein's Christ, which later brought the artistic pilgrims flocking, is a figure of another power. The sculptor has given him the graceless, charmless, formless carriage of the man who has just passed through the valley of the shadow, and who emerges, austere, emaciated, but triumphant and almost contemptuous, from an abyss of sorrow. He shows his large hands pierced and bleeding, but his head, flawless and massive, sad and bold, is held upright with a virile gesture, and it takes up anew, with life, the command of fate. Such, too, is the feeling which seems to have taken hold of British fiction and British life. But this is to anticipate.

To the period of Russian influence, between 1912 and 1916, there corresponds an unconscious literary amorphism which was a reaction against the French plasticity of the preceding age. Now the French masters, whether they are great artists like Flaubert and Maupassant, or massive and powerful writers like Zola, or exquisite masters of irony and intellectual grace like Anatole France, all bring to their work something finished, precise. And their work, in turn, leaves on the reader an impression

more or less powerful, more or less æsthetic, but an impression that is clear and susceptible of definition. They are, as has been said, clearer than life—which is not clear. They simplify life for the sake of expressing it. But they do express it. There is intelligence and order even in their depictions of the instinctive and the obscure. The Russians have no interest in this clarity; and many young English novelists imitate them in this respect. It is enough for them to follow the meanderings of a life, the development of one or more careers, to thread together the accidents or incidents of one or more existences, for them to perform, or think that they have performed, the novelist's task.

Beyond doubt, provided there is genius or even talent in the novels thus conceived, there is nothing to keep them from being masterpieces. Lesage and Smollett produced them in the eighteenth century, according to no other formula. No one has meandered more, and with less sense of order, than the fathers of the English novel. It is not necessary to construct a psychological drama in order to write a great novel, but no more is it sufficient to pluck endless garlands of adventures in order to found a new genre and consecrate it with marvels. What is best in the Russian models is not, perhaps, specifically Russian. And it is far from certain that the young English novelists have not extracted from this model what is worst—incoherence and amorphism.

A parallel influence has been exercised by those writers who, for the last twenty years, for divers reasons, have been resuscitating the elastic novel, the novel which has neither beginning nor end, which stretches over two or three generations, or spreads itself at the author's will through contemporary but independent groups, with no other bind-

ing link than the personalities of one or two characters. The "Life Novel," the novel of a whole life, which was the fashion before the war, no longer suffices for the majority of the younger novelists. They need no less than two or three interwoven lives, children and parents, in order to present and frame their narrative. Here we have the collapsible-fishing-rod novel. Or the same characters, the same group, may be presented from different angles in a series of books that are mutually complementary. This is the "panel" novel. A number of young English writers have thus told the same story in several books, related the same events as seen through the eyes of one and then another of the principal characters.[1] It should be noted that these enormous machines are no longer explained, as in the cases of Balzac and Zola, by sociological intention, by the intention of taking apart the various wheels of a civilization and revealing their mechanism. Here are particular lives, individual existences, which, without collective object, are juxtaposed in imposing trilogies or strung out in concentric series, with a plentiful reinforcement of dates and other chronological details. Samuel Butler was one of the first to represent, from scientific conviction, entire sections instead of single links of the human chain, and to enumerate with precision their displacements on the moving platform of Time. Preoccupied by fewer intentions, William de Morgan recreated in the twentieth century interminable romantic biographies after the manner of Dickens. But it is, perhaps, a French writer, Romain Rolland, who has done most, by the example and influence of his *Jean-Christophe*,

[1] Thackeray, Kipling and Arnold Bennett have, indeed, exploited the same characters in various books; but with them it is not a *system.*

to re-acclimatize in the twentieth-century novel that biographical superabundance of which the late eighteenth century furnished many an example. The English publishers, who have always had a preference for three-volume novels—one suspects their reasons—were not disposed, until the paper shortage, to oppose a movement that so well served their interests.

Never for a hundred years have we seen so many "parallel" novels or novels in "series." A self-respecting writer no longer constructs cottages or houses, but hamlets and little cities. Or, when he does undertake a single edifice, he so arranges it that no one single glance can comprehend the whole. According to this method one is assured of not having to bother with rules of proportion.

In default of this external unity, some young English novelists have attempted to realize a kind of internal unity by applying the principle of "point of view," which was formulated and demonstrated by Henry James. They try not to substitute themselves for their characters in order to explain them, they seek to present events in a rigorously objective fashion, not as they see them or as they wish us to see them, but as they imagine their heroes have lived, understood and felt them. There is no doubt that, to a certain degree, none of their predecessors was free from this fundamental necessity, mother of all verisimilitude, which requires an author to efface himself behind his hero. But there is manner and degree in this separation. In the majority of the nineteenth-century novelists, even the most objective, the personality of the author, his intention and his object, remain visible or perceptible between the book and the reader. Some of them, like Dickens and Meredith—in other respects so dissimilar—permeate their books by a kind of omni-

presence. Others, like Thackeray, cannot refrain from direct personal intervention. And certainly there are some among the younger English novelists, such as Hugh Walpole, Temple Thurston, and many another, whose virtue is not self-effacement. But many of their confrères, sufficiently numerous to justify a general observation, and sufficiently talented to obtain a preponderant influence, manifest a sincere and meritorious tendency, that is full of promise, towards complete objectivity. I am thinking of the best work of J. D. Beresford and of Oliver Onions (there is true realism), and especially of a still newer school, almost exclusively impressionistic, which is dominated by women of great talent such as Miss Dorothy Richardson. This movement ill accords with the frequent return in contemporary fiction of the extraordinary character, larger, more violent, or more powerful than nature, who is really a romantic legacy. In vain is this prodigy of energy and intensity made modern, ultra-modern, full of common sense, and comic in certain respects; in vain is he objectively studied and presented according to the exact and patient methods of realism, the most scientific realism: he is none the less, by his very conception, a prodigy, that is to say a romantic character. The hero of *Sonia*, and Tasker Jevons himself, are examples.

Finally, I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that I can discover in the younger English novelists, different as they are, so truly irreducible to any general definition as they are, a very perceptible aptitude at making us penetrate deeper than did their predecessors into real intimacy with their characters. We are better informed as to how these later characters live, how they dress, lodge, earn their living. We penetrate their dining-

rooms, their studies, sometimes their bedrooms. But be reassured! We do not find here, we shall never find, flagrant indiscretions that are useless as well. Public taste would make short work of them. The gratuitous filthiness of the false realism which nearly dishonoured the French novel, twenty or thirty years ago, is hardly to be feared among our neighbours. But at the same time the existence of those fictitious characters who, for a century, have revealed only a part of their lives, a part of their thoughts and their sensations, appears artificial. To know them, a reader does not have to know all that a valet or a room-mate would know, but he does wish to have a greater knowledge of their physical life than a visitor or a passer-by would have. Above all, he has a right to ascertain or to divine all of their moral life, even the portion of it that they hide from themselves. Wells, Bennett, and principally Galsworthy, have, indeed, lifted the curtain behind which the true "gentleman" and the purest woman do not always dare to penetrate and recognize each other. Certain young novelists, Compton Mackenzie, Gilbert Cannan, D. H. Lawrence, have tried to be still franker, still more sincere. But in the present state of public opinion, they can never be sufficiently frank to bring to the English novel that fraction of truth—only a fraction, as I am well aware—of which the French novel, since *Madame Bovary*, cannot be dispossessed.

One of them, W. L. George, has dealt with this subject, in his book *A Novelist on Novels*, in a manner that deserves attention:

"No character in a modern English novel," he writes, "has been fully developed. Sometimes, as in the case of Mendel, of Jude the Obscure, of Mark Lennan, of Gyp

Fiorsen, one has the impression that they are fully developed because the book mainly describes their sex adventures, but one could write a thousand pages about sex adventures and have done nothing but produce sentimental atmosphere. . . . It may be argued that the English are not, as a nation, interested in sex, that they do not discuss it and that they do not think about it. If this were true, then a novelist would be sincere if he devoted nine-tenths of his novel to business and play and no more than a tenth to sex. But it is not true. The English, particularly English women, speak a great deal about sex and, as they are certainly shy of the subject, they must devote to it a great deal of thought which they never put into words. If anybody doubts this, let him play eavesdropper in a club, a public house, or an office, listen to men, their views, their stories; let him especially discover how many 'humorous' tales are based on sex. And let him discreetly ascertain the topics young women discuss when no men are present: some, like Elsie Lindtner, are frank enough to tell. In their private lives the English do not talk of sex as they would like to, but they do talk, and more openly every day. Yet their sex preoccupations are not reflected in the novels which purport to reflect their lives; conversation is over-sexed, the novel is under-sexed, therefore untrue, therefore insincere. For this there is no immediate remedy."

And W. L. George cites numerous examples to support his opinion, which may be summarized as follows: The English novel, through fear of the policeman, is condemned to hypocrisy, to lying by preterition in regard to everything that touches the relations between the sexes. And these relations are its principal subject.

It must be admitted, however, that the young novelists

of the twentieth century stand in less fear of the policeman, and make fewer sacrifices to Mrs. Grundy, than did their predecessors of the nineteenth century, or even their immediate forerunners.

This summary would not be complete if I failed to mention the part played by the subconscious and the "beyond" in all this youthful literature. There are few novels of recent years in which the occult forces of the soul have not been invoked. Even in the clearest and most realistic of them one senses a certain something of which the past generation was innocent. An obscure correspondence is constantly suggested between the dead and the living, the absent and the present, the visible and the invisible worlds. The rôle of the subconscious in the acts, thoughts and feelings of the characters is rarely passed over, and it is sometimes wonderfully dealt with because it is lightly and delicately indicated. Several of the younger women novelists have, in this respect, an acuteness of perception, a sureness of touch that deserve to be noted. I am thinking particularly of Miss Dorothy Richardson and Miss Clemence Dane. The theories and experiments of Freud and Jung, often misunderstood or abusively interpreted, inspire a good half of the contemporary novels.

It is useless to remark on the contradictory character of some of these tendencies. In what country or what time have the characteristics of an age or of a literary genre ever been other than contradictory? Perspective alone, with the abstraction that it permits, arbitrarily unifies in the eyes of posterity, or rather in the eyes of students, the principal traits of a literature. Without seeking to reconcile the tendencies of the younger con-

temporary novelists, let us try rather, by virtue of example, to make some of them known.

II

## *Hugh Walpole*

Hugh Walpole is, perhaps, the most widely read novelist of the younger school, which does not mean that he is the best. His opportunism is flagrant. He seems to have espoused simultaneously all the literary fashions of his day, sought (and found) success in all quarters, and scarcely been himself save in his first books.

Belonging by birth to one of the most cultivated circles, but brought up away from his family, he must have experienced that turning back upon himself, that suffering of a sensitive child in a rough school environment, which has saddened the youth of many a writer while determining his vocation. *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* is the inside story of one of those small English schools, lost and isolated in the country, in which the quarrels and animosities of rival masters poison existence. I was once familiar with a *milieu* of this kind, and can therefore testify that Hugh Walpole scarcely exaggerates. His book is a necessary corrective for the too flattering pictures of English education that so many others have given us. The small scholarly communities of the provinces offer great advantages for the education of body and will; but it must be recognized that they have their dangers, their inconveniences, and these not merely for the pupils. *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* describes the deterioration of the teachers, in consequence of isolation and mutual jealousy. Their reciprocal exasperation,

resulting from the perpetual contact of incompatible characters, the fermentation within a closed vessel of the good and evil seeds that have been sown in them by university life—all this is finely and powerfully depicted. With all their petty traits, these unhappy men remain human and sympathetic; for one feels that they are the victims rather than the authors of their misery. And one discovers here the weakness of an educational system that is in other respects so strong and sane.

Mr. Walpole's romantic pretensions begin with *A Prelude to Adventure*. To what could this story of a crime in the university world of Cambridge be a prelude? Even if the melodrama were consequential! But it leads nowhere, and leaves one with the impression of a nightmare that has turned out to be a cock-and-bull story.

*Fortitude* is one of those great biographical machines which are so dear to the novelists of to-day. When these life novels are patiently and honestly composed, with the intention of presenting and explaining a human being, a family, a race, or a *milieu*, one may excuse and respect their abundant sincerity even while one grows impatient at their long-windedness. But when one feels that their great skeletons have been erected for the purpose of introducing the usual batches of current clichés, when one sees them made, with a concerted but disconcerting ability, the receptacles of scraps of all that has caught the public interest or been fashionable during the past twenty years, then the attention wanders. This is the punishment of too facile novelists. The leitmotiv of *Fortitude* is an academic platitude: What counts in life is not life itself, but the courage that we bring to it. So young Peter Westcott, heir of a father and a grandfather who

were violent and detestable, himself wild and uncontrolled although tender-hearted, leaves his beloved county of Cornwall, enters the employ of a London publisher, escapes the anarchistic contagion, achieves success through literature, marries, is unhappy, betrayed, and then returns to his native village, where the traditional fate of the Westcotts awaits him. But he will not cease to be courageous. The gods be praised for it. . . .

There is everything in this book, even an eccentric friendship of the Russian variety between the young hero and a vagrant evangelist, Stephen. As I remember it, the best portions are the descriptions of ordinary life in London. *Maradick at Forty* is the inconsequential story of a holiday taken by a mature man.

In *The Duchess of Wrexe* (1914) one sees the development of an instructive theory regarding English society at the beginning of the twentieth century. The duchess, an old pagan idol, who is the centre of her family and her world, is conquered by two young rebels. Her granddaughter Rachel and her grandson Francis, Rachel's cousin, have been born of irregular marriages. The example and contagion of their unconscious revolt ends by disrupting the oppressive clan of the ducal family. We witness the same tragedy, the same disintegration, in *The Green Mirror*, at the expense of a bourgeois tribe. The revolutionary leaven here is introduced by an Englishman infected with Slavism. The progressive separation between mother and daughter, the ruptures created by the schism between the old order and the new, are the more affecting because they exclude neither tenderness nor a reciprocal feeling of esteem between those who are at once authors and victims of this separation.

The composition is puerile; the intention of the narrative is sometimes underlined as though the reader were incapable of perceiving it. But, when all is said, there are ideas in this book, and a coherent system of thought and feeling. With *Jeremy* we return to analysis and narrative that are devoid of apparent object, to trivial adventures which unroll in the soul of a child and, later, a young man.

The unfortunate fact is that Hugh Walpole seems always to be in tow of some fashion or literary movement. On a foreign reader he often produces the effect of a "follower" rather than a "maker." It would be a pity were he to become a drawing-room novelist. Almost all his books are "educations." Nothing could be more instructive, for life after all is only a school of character; but it is essential that it should achieve the formation of a character. And to reflect life, the mirror of fiction must be held with a firm hand, and not be inclined according to the chances of fashion.

## III

### *Oliver Onions*

In the same degree that Hugh Walpole is supple and urbane, Oliver Onions is rude, inflexible, and rough. It would seem that he takes pleasure in playing a crabbed rôle. It is as though regretfully that he explains himself and explains his characters. While reading him, one always feels that he is only half opening his hand; the thought of holding it out does not even occur to him. Every one of his pages contains something that is unex-

pressed, and it is not always the inexpressible. But nothing is lost by this; for, in the shadow, Onions is heaping up events and moral or psychological catastrophes. All is badly lighted, half conscious, sometimes scarcely indicated. His books are crabbed, powerful, sometimes deceptive with their air of sincerity. Each makes one think of a diamond that has not yet emerged from its gangue.

Oliver Onions is best known by his trilogy: *In Accordance with the Evidence, The Story of Louie, Debit Account.* It is a story laid in the shallows of London's middle class: Bohemians, models, typists, poor artists. The same event fills the three novels with its repercussions, and is seen as in a three-faced prism through the temperaments of the three principal characters: Jeffries, Louie, and Evie.

Jeffries has "suicided" Archie Merridew on the eve of the day when he was to marry Evie and give her syphilis. "In accordance with the evidence," the suicide is officially recognized. Such is the subject of the first volume. The cause of the crime is divined, suggested, but never explained. The word, the name, are not pronounced.

A prisoner of his altruistic and righteous crime, Jeffries becomes, despite his poverty, responsible for the fate of Evie, whom he has loved for a long time. He marries her. But the shadow and mystery of the tragedy is destined to come, increasingly, between them. Jeffries prospers, he becomes famous and rich. He is not even suspected. Meanwhile, he can neither hold his tongue nor confess. He ends by sinking into madness and suicide. This is the "debit account" that must always be dis-

charged, even when the debt is honourable. Evie, too, pays in the same fashion for her innocent part in the tragedy.

Meanwhile, Louie has been in love with Jeffries. And the story of the beautiful Louie Causton fills the third volume, which is the best. The daughter of a boxer and a noble heiress, alive with race and vigour, generous and energetic, destined by her inheritance to betrayals of the flesh, she has left her family, chosen a trade, and entered a horticultural school for young girls. Nothing could be more curious and unhackneyed than the description of this *milieu*. Louie gives herself gloriously, joyously, to a handsome rascal whom she thereafter forgets, becomes a mother, and finds her father now divorced, cast off, and in hiding. She earns her living, meets Jeffries, loves him hopelessly, guesses the crime, is the first to hear the confession of it, and is assured until Jeffries' death of the bitter happiness of being his friend, not his mistress. An artist's model, she is one day surprised in complete nakedness by the man she loves, and, possessed by his glance, she will thenceforward give herself to no one.

The frankness of the descriptions and the situations, the concentrated passion of the principal characters, the comparative and dramatic brevity of certain episodes, fostered the hope that Oliver Onions would be the best interpreter of his generation. But his latest productions have not realized this anticipation. One may fear that the rough and unfinished nature of his first books was an evidence not of power but of impotence, and that he has exhausted the primitive force of his temperament. Perhaps he is simply undergoing a process of renovation. In any case, one knows that he has wished infinitely not to

be, not to wish to be, a mere public entertainer. This is the reproach to which Compton Mackenzie is exposed.

IV

## *Compton Mackenzie*

Before the war, a curious phenomenon occurred in the literary atmosphere of England. The preceding generation had been spoiled; it had produced five great novelists; they had pronounced their message, given the best of themselves. People seemed to await, as a right, as a necessity, the advent of another pleiad. Critics and amateurs were on tiptoe to distinguish the young arrivals, and to accord them, sometimes prematurely, the palm of success. The war, which revealed so many poets and so many heroes among the young university students, has served only to strengthen this tendency. The profession of precursor became profitable. Many John the Baptists—who had lived neither in the desert nor on locusts—spent their days in announcing the Messiah of the novel. These chicks of glory have suffered the misfortunes of moulting. Compton Mackenzie, one of the most praised, has been one of those to suffer most.

The son of a well-known and esteemed actor and actress, Compton Mackenzie was inclined by birth and education to become a literary mime. In *A Passionate Elopement*, he has imitated with talent the graces of the eighteenth century. In *Carnival*, he has recounted with verve, after the manner of the Goncourts, the childhood and youth of a London ballet-girl. With an increasing abundance of superfluous details and small inconsequential

facts, he has described, in *Sinister Street*, the school-days and first loves of Michael and Stella Fane. The subject recalls that of many a novel by Gyp or Colette Willy. Michael and Stella, the children of an irregular liaison, belong by birth to the highest social class, but their characters are developed in equivocal circumstances. Their birth and their heredity make of them exceptional creatures, who grow up in a complex atmosphere, and the conflict of opposed tendencies which strive for mastery in Michael is especially interesting. But what disorder, what over-abundance, what a pell-mell in these two volumes! One would say that in Compton Mackenzie's judgment everything is fit to print. He permits himself neither the faculty nor the leisure for selection. Since then, Wells has written a novel of education of almost the same sort, *Joan and Peter*, in which, dealing with an analogous subject, he abandons himself to the same debauch of useless details. But Wells has, at least, ideas. Compton Mackenzie exhibits only circumstances and impressions. A less famous author, Richard Pryce, under the title *David Penstephen*, has recently described the infancy and education of a child born out of wedlock, and with less literary talent, but with more truth, more selection, he has made a book that is at once traditional and convincing. Conviction, that is what Compton Mackenzie lacks most. He does not experience it, and he does not provoke it.

Take one of his latest books: *The Early Life and Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett*. Like *Carnival* and *Sinister Street*, like so many other contemporary novels, and notably those of Hugh Walpole, this is the story of an adventurous youth and also of a group, for the characters of earlier novels come to mingle with the life of the heroine.

Sylvia's adventures and successive love affairs, more numerous and more unlikely than those of eighteenth-century novels, follow one another through the first half of the book without the reader gaining the least idea of their effect upon the character of heroine. The infancy in Lille, the flight to England with a father compelled to cross the frontier, the association with blacklegs, thugs and charlatans in the underworld of London, the unfruitful assaults of protectors, the innocent escapade with the false friend, the unbelievable and unbelievably escaped perils through which the guileful innocence of Sylvia threads its way—all this, which in the picaresque novel was sufficient to interest seventeenth-century readers, appears unreal to readers of the twentieth century, and insupportable because it is stripped of all psychology. The literary charm of the pastiche, which in certain French writers—Abel Hermant, for example—saves productions of the same genre, is not even perceptible in *Sylvia Scarlett*.

In fine, Compton Mackenzie, with all his virtuosity, would not be worthy of being counted as a novelist, had not the suffrage of his compatriots already established him. One feels everywhere in his writing a histrionic quality, a love of scenery for scenery's sake, with nothing behind it save darkness and draughts. A gift which may, perhaps, save him is that of humour. His irony is a savoury *mélange* of gamin wit and acute observation. *Poor Relations* owes to these qualities an incontestable and deserved success. But, here again, he must learn to choose. As Anatole France observes: "To say all is to say nothing. If literature ceases to choose and to love, then it is as fallen as the woman who gives herself without preference."

V

## *J. D. Beresford*

If it were necessary to point out among the novelists of the younger generation, not the most skilful, but the one most equally endowed with that *intelligence* and that *imagination* of life which make good writers of fiction, it is probable that I should choose J. D. Beresford. He never strives to carry conviction; but he knows and feels what he writes. One guesses that he has suffered, lived. But he never falls into sentimentality. He does not run after effects; he is without literary reminiscences.

Born in 1873, he has been crippled from childhood as the result of an accident. At the age of thirty he abandoned architecture for literature, his first and constant vocation. After five years of earning his bread as best he could (notably by writing advertisements) he finally joined the *Westminster Gazette*, and continued as a critic on that periodical until 1914. Since then he has lived upon his novels, and his novels have fed upon his life.

He began by writing brilliant and profound fantasies after the manner of Wells, but more compact, richer in meat and juice. *The Hampdenshire Wonder* has been translated into French under the title of *Le Génie*.

The first part of *Goslings* is a masterful evocation of those thousands of petty employees' families which the industrialization of existence has reduced to automatism. The women no longer know, think, or do anything. A formidable plague, which has attacked only the men, has reduced the male population of Europe to a few rare specimens. The cities are deserted, all industry abolished. The women continue to exist in precarious groups,

scattered over the country, and, for reproductive purposes, quarrel among themselves over the miraculous survivors of the vanished sex. The current problems of love and labour are posed or touched upon in this highly imaginative book, which another age will re-read.

But J. D. Beresford quickly turned away from these air castles toward what must be called realism, in default of a more exact term, even when it is concerned with what is most mysterious in reality.

"A better and more ancient word for realism was 'poetry'; but the word has been debased by the versifiers who call themselves poets just as painters call themselves artists: both are titles that only posterity can award."

This remark of Compton Mackenzie applies not only to himself.

Patiently, seriously and sincerely, the author of *Goslings* now began to look within himself and around him, and attempted to express in all frankness what he saw and felt. There is reason to suspect that this frankness has sometimes been solicited by brutal exceptions rather than by average reality; but the effort has brought forth two or three books, more or less autobiographical, whose worth is greater than their fame. J. D. Beresford began less noisily than the majority of his contemporaries; it is quite possible that his voice will be heard for a longer time.

He is one of those authors who are not content with a single book, a single life. He, too, employs groups of characters and reticulated works. His most remarkable production is a trilogy that is almost entirely autobiographic: *The Early History of Jacob Stahl* (1911), *A Candidate for Truth* (1912), and *The Invisible Event* (1915). Here is a solid and durable monument.

Like all autobiographies, those of J. D. Beresford submit with difficulty to analysis. So soon as he begins to write, this architect seems to lose all knowledge of plan and proportion. He has explained and justified himself:

"When I design a building, I come by degrees to visualize the whole of it and to place it, mentally, in relation to its surroundings. . . . The writing of a novel, and more particularly the setting down of a piece of autobiography, is a very different undertaking. . . . But the insuperable difficulty that must confront the writer who would give to his story the neatness and finish of a completed work is the consideration that life is a succession. The account of an episode may be neatly rounded off, and given an air of completeness; but I can find no stopping-point in the story of a life. Even death would not, now, finish the long train of events; for something of what I learnt in Keppel Street has already been taught to my two children." (*House-Mates.*)

J. D. Beresford, then, like many another of his English confrères, holds that in fiction, as in life, everything must be reticulated, rooted in the past and ramified in the present. According to this, nothing is supervenient. Material necessities alone limit the extent of the novel. So let us no longer be astonished at his entangled creations.

I give the theory for what it is worth. It springs from the pan-psychism of Samuel Butler, and is based on the supposition that, strictly speaking, there is no individual existence. Like all theories, it serves only to justify a practice. And this practice appears definitely to be that of the artisan, not the artist. Let us say, then, that

J. D. Beresford is one of the best artisans of fiction. Nor is this scant praise.

One of his books, *House-Mates*, recently published in France, tells how a young Englishman of the middle class succeeds in escaping from his shell, to become a man instead of a gentleman. First, a mental carapace of reserve, an armature of convention, had to be broken. There had to be an end to the perpetual, careful conformity to custom, an end to the external imitation of others, an end to the easy habit of never seeing what should be hidden, of not knowing things that it is proper to ignore. Born in an Anglican parsonage (like J. D. Beresford), Wilfrid Hornby escapes a clergyman's career and becomes an architect, like Beresford.

A correct engagement and a comfortable marriage are about to establish him in the deaf, dumb and blind respectability in which so many other lives have aborted. But instinct and the necessities of life compel him to take bachelor quarters in a low district and a common house. Tenants from every class live under the same roof. His life becomes mingled with theirs: the feeling of equality and solidarity awakes in him. The providential desertion of his fiancée emancipates him. The house in Keppel Street acts upon him as a sitting hen upon an egg.

He discovers that the lodger on the first floor, Miss Rose Whiting, is a loose woman; and, like the ninny that he is, she evokes in him alternate fits of temptation and repulsion. The landlord of the house is an unspeakable naturalized German, mixture of guile and candour, cupidity and craven spirit. At the outset, Wilfrid Hornby commits the foolish error of imagining that the other women in the house are of the same type as Miss Whiting.

Now these three irregulars are indeed rebels, but they are decent, sincere, and respectable. The oldest, Mrs. Hargreaves, has, at the age of forty, left her husband. The youngest, Judith, with whom Wilfrid Hornby quickly falls in love, has left her aunts, at the age of twenty, because like himself she was suffocating in a rarefied atmosphere. Helen Binstead is passionately attached to Judith Carrington, as to the work of her heart, her mind, her very life. She has emancipated her friend, and she is jealous. Her whole being revolts at the thought that Judith will be subjugated by love and drawn into marriage, that is to say servitude; but she does not perceive that she herself is in the process of making her a slave. In the course of the battle between Helen and Wilfrid for the possession of Judith, all the nuances of modern feminism are noted in these three women. A literary journalist, Hill, serves as a bond and an interpreter between these very different creatures. Scenes that are violent, bold, and symbolical, but soberly and vigorously treated, mark the development of the characters. It is Rose Whiting who, in order not to be evicted, in a fit of hysterical anger, strips off all her clothes; and before the scandal of this nakedness the forces of order take flight in disorder. It is Helen, trembling with repulsion, who comes at night to offer herself to Wilfrid Hornby, for the sake of retaining her friend; counting upon masculine temptation and weakness, and a consequent winning of Judith. Finally, it is the murder of Rose by a casual lover which lays bare hidden horrors, compromises Wilfrid and offers him an occasion to justify himself. He is reduced to poverty by his confidence in a couple more unfortunate than culpable. But he has won Judith, and with Judith he arrives at the consciousness of human worth and dignity.

*House-Mates*, in fine, is the story of a blooming. The house in Keppel Street has forced Wilfrid to self-realization by communion and equality with his fellows. Millions of young men of his generation have, before and during the war, passed through the same experience. They can no longer be restrained.

His year's stay in Keppel Street emancipated Wilfrid Hornby. During the very first weeks he felt that he was free:

"I was not afraid any more of my house-mates. . . . Yet I do not wish to convey the impression that there was anything miraculous in my apparent change of mind. The longing for some spiritual enlargement had always been with me, but all the forces of my training, all the models of my life had withheld me from any expression. I was, I still am, a plastic, adaptable creature, and I had sedulously modelled and enthroned the one idea that had always been put before me. The profession of becoming a gentleman had been the idol I was taught to worship, and none had ever suggested to me that my idol lacked comprehensiveness. Good form, the esteem of my contemporaries, a little fame and position, and the getting of as much money as I could honestly acquire, these were the sole objects of social life. Behind them lay the necessity of ensuring peace through eternity by the careful observation of certain ritual formalities. No one had ever gone deeper than that with me; no one had ever talked to me of a beauty that was not stereotyped.

"My sudden enlargement had been brought about by intense nervous excitement, and a new sight of life—life unrestrained, passionate, elemental. I had been ready and the freedom of my loneliness had helped to release me. But there was another factor which, however unrealized

that Sunday morning, was perhaps the most potent of all. For the first time in my life I was beautifully, wonderfully in love."

Later, when love and suffering, sympathy and conflict, have finally done their work, Wilfrid Hornby describes with downright, simple candour the rôle of the house in Keppel Street:

"We had been united, all of us, in our common struggle. However diverse our characters or ambitions, we had for the most part achieved sympathy; and even where there had been hate—as in the strife between Helen and myself—it had been a human, I think I may say an honest quality, that had left no bitterness. Helen and I had in a peculiar sense been *equals* in our fight for Judith. All of us there in the house had been equals. . . . And this simple realization of essential equality with the rest of mankind constitutes, I suppose, the change in myself that I have insisted upon from the beginning. All my upbringing had taught me to divide society into categories. People were judged by their position and labelled as eligible or ineligible acquaintances; as people one ought or ought not to know. In Keppel Street I learnt to alter my standard of values. I learnt, before all, that there is not such a creature as a fellow human being I ought not to know; and that just so long as I shrank from sharing the interests of my fellow-men, so long must I remain a mere egg; a cramped, distorted entity, bound within a shell that permitted me no true sight of life."

And finally, when the renascence is complete, he per-

ceives new horizons, as though by the light of a fire that has suddenly pierced the night.

"Ahead of us lies only too clearly another, and possibly a greater phase of strife. I know that when this war is over we shall have to face the immense conflict between Capital and Labour; between the aristocracy and the dispossessed, separated as they are by that dull, immobile crowd that we speak of as the Middle Classes. And I know that it is a conflict that will come all the sooner if we should be blessed by a fruitful, unarmed peace. But that struggle is inevitable, and in a sense I do not deplore its necessity. It will not be wasteful, but constructive. . . . And if we can only find release from all the oppressions of conformity and ugliness by revolution, then revolution may be a blessed thing."

Who is it speaking thus? A young man who was yesterday the very type of the petty, traditional English bourgeois. There are millions who speak the same language to-day.

An immense movement is going on in England under our eyes, and we do not see it. In political and social life it is causing upheavals which appear inexplicable. Parliamentary acrobatism tries in vain to adapt itself to these disturbances. Whoever wishes to perceive them in the contemporary novel will find J. D. Beresford's work devoid neither of value nor virtue. The writer, it is said, is mediocre. His culture is scanty, his taste dubious. He is a technicist who has taken up the pen. There is no literary education behind his novelist's education.

What does it matter, if life has served him as a school?

VI

## *D. H. Lawrence*

The first literary efforts of D. H. Lawrence were rewarded by the dangerous fame of scandal. A novelist who survives this kind of success doubly merits his renown. But it is not certain that D. H. Lawrence has escaped the consequences of his victory. He is one of those young authors who, during a brief period, were successively awaited and saluted as so many Messiahs. I must confess that in none of them have I been able to discover anything at all Messianic.

D. H. Lawrence is incontestably a poet. He has the temperament of an unequal and volcanic writer. But he emits a deal of ashes with his lava, and all the flashes of his eruptions do not make a steady light.

The son of a northern miner, Lawrence became monitor in a primary school, entered a teachers' normal school, came out of it as a London schoolmaster, and dedicated himself to literature after the success of his first two books: *The White Peacock* (1911) and *The Trespasser* (1912). He was then twenty-five years old.

Nothing could be more naïve, nor more apparently unlikely, than the characters of the young persons who people *The White Peacock*. These English northcountrymen who have read Tchekoff and Maupassant, these little rustics fed on a decadent music, may be discoverable. There is no lack of Swedish and Norwegian farms on which one can find their brothers and their cousins. But, even if they are real, they do not convince us of their reality. The impression created by them is that of speaking marionettes, whom the author, with

juvenile pedantry, uses as mouthpieces for what he has retained from his hasty reading.

A feeling for nature that is almost painful in its fierceness, a sensual emotion that is omnipresent and ever burning—this is what strikes one especially in the books of D. H. Lawrence. When he began to write, the experiments and theories of Freud were making a great stir, and the sexual origin of subconscious images, which govern the conscious mind to so great an extent, still had all the freshness of a discovery. The literary verjuice of adolescents was passing readily for genius, provided that their psycho-physiological confidences were coloured by a native poetry and a natural power of expression. All the young English novelists have profited, or suffered, from this orientation, and D. H. Lawrence more than any of them.

His second book, *The Trespasser*, is the story of a tragic episode. Sigmund and Helen spend a week of passion and possession in a solitary house by the edge of the sea. The account of this single week, marked by no other events than the various stages of satiety, fills two-thirds of the volume. It is very long, the story of such a love; it reminds one of the amours of serpents. The final third contains the return of Sigmund to his family; the increasing hostility of children already grown; the feeling of shame, desolation and misery in this household in which the wife, the mother, without revolting, is submerged by her sorrow; the inexorable and furtive approach of the catastrophe; the suicide of Sigmund—all this is of the first order. Helena takes another lover in the same manner, with the same gesture, that she took Sigmund. The woman forgets. The man dies.

Is it because physical love has been, until recently, a forbidden subject in English literature? Do those who deal with it lack simplicity because it requires courage? In any case, these writers always seem like fair-ground Herculeses devoting themselves to feats of strength. With extended arms, they seem to be carrying great cardboard weights. It is an exercise which appears complicated and painful. But the remainder of the story in *The Trespasser* is told with remarkable power and sobriety.

It is more difficult for the French reader to appreciate *Sons and Lovers*, which is considered D. H. Lawrence's best novel, if he is unacquainted with the manners and dialect of the miners in the north of England; and it is impossible, now, for him to read *The Rainbow*, as this book has been suppressed by the censor. It would be regrettable if D. H. Lawrence's literary career should end as it began, in alarms and tumult. His talent deserves a better fate. Noise does not always do good; and the good rarely makes a noise.

## VII

### *Frank Swinnerton*

Frank Swinnerton's career is not lacking in certain resemblances to that of J. D. Beresford. Born in 1884, he led the sad, miserable existence which is the lot of so many poor children in the poorer quarters of London. "At fourteen," he writes, "I went to work as an office boy in circumstances similar to those in which Stephen Moore [*The Chaste Wife*] began." The preceding years had been for him years of starvation and serious illness.

To-day he is reader for a publishing-house, and critic of the *Manchester Guardian*. He has published two interesting literary studies; a sympathetic one of Gissing, and a severe one of Stevenson.

His first three books—*The Merry Heart, The Young Idea, The Casement*—won him partisans, especially in America, but few readers. The following three—*The Happy Family, On the Staircase, The Chaste Wife*—firmly established his reputation.

Among the latest three, *Nocturne* was hailed as a masterpiece, and it has already been translated into several languages. This great and rather hasty success, to which the enthusiastic sponsorship of Wells and Bennett indubitably contributed, was perhaps prejudicial to the success of *Shops and Houses* and *September*. Nothing less than marvels were expected from a young author whom the recognized masters of the novel had publicly anointed as one of their worthiest successors.

He owes his writer's talent to nothing but nature and his own toil. In his case the education and university comradeship which helped to model so many of his young confrères was replaced by a solitary apprenticeship under the discipline of a trade. The first fruits, several volumes of prose, have not yet been published. This harsh school, which resembles Maupassant's, has made of him a conscientious and severe writer.

He has set down a conception of his art which may be summarized as follows: It matters little whether a novel be long or short, a miniature or a panorama, whether it extends over one or more generations. Art is not measured by length or thickness. It is the result of originality in conception and harmony in execution. Originality does not mean eccentricity; measure and har-

mony do not imply dryness and poverty. Whatever the dimensions of a work, it requires a preliminary composition and an absolute subordination of details to the whole. In other words, the art of the novelist is a discipline, like every other art. The capacity for invention and narration is not alone sufficient; it is a puerile, not a virile faculty. The discipline is limited by respect for internal originality. There is no need of the rule killing the inspiration, nor the letter the spirit. In fine, fiction, like reality, lives on compromises.

There is nothing revolutionary, it seems, in this theory of the novel. But, on the one hand, it does not explain all of Frank Swinnerton's work; and, on the other, what it does explain is sufficiently different from the bulk of contemporary books. It excludes, for example, all moral or social lessons. Wells, who understands his art only as an instrument of reform and collective progress, has nevertheless rendered most generous praise to Frank Swinnerton: "I have never once 'presented' life. My apparently most objective books are criticisms and incitements to change. Such a writer as Mr. Swinnerton, on the contrary, sees life and renders it with a steadiness and detachment and patience quite foreign to my disposition. He has no underlying motive. He sees and tells. His aim is the attainment of that beauty which comes with exquisite presentation."

The effect of such a method is the more striking when it is applied to *milieux* and subjects apparently barren of all beauty. Nine times out of ten Frank Swinnerton describes the lower quarters of London, chooses his characters from the classes most devoid of artistic feeling and education, abstains from isolating them, and follows

the fate not of the individual but of the group or family. Yet, by penetration and analytical subtlety, by exquisite choice of detail and intensity of observation, he achieves hitherto unsuspected effects in realistic poetry.

*Nocturne* was published in 1917. The action (all psychological) is so concentrated that it unfolds in a single night, and is participated in by five characters, not one more. The development is effected so sparingly that the novel, as is the case with almost all books by the same author, occupies fewer pages than the "Prelude" of many a contemporary trilogy. Yet it is a whole world that is reflected in this crystal lens. "And I remember Wells saying to me," writes Arnold Bennett, " 'You know, Arnold, he achieves a perfection in *Nocturne* that you and I never get within streets of.' A hard saying to pass between two hardened pilgrims whose combined years total over a century, but justified." Whoever has not read *Nocturne* is unacquainted with one of the freshest and most characteristic books of the younger school. It is one of the contemporary novels which seem most assured of lasting fame.

Among Frank Swinnerton's latest works, we must remember *September*. Almost all his earlier books depicted the young middle-class girl and the slum life of London. Almost insolently, he has succeeded in expressing by means of his modistes and typists as much mystery and more humanity than have ever been translated by the queens, princesses and sober citizens of the classic tradition. *September* presents a young girl who is cultivated and emancipated, but as profoundly instinctive, despite her mental complexity, as the most ordinary shop-girl. Confronted by Cherry Maud, Marian Foster, the mature woman, morally and intellectually refined, pro-

foundly respectable without narrowness, deliciously capable of love and weakness, but still more capable of sacrifice and of humanity, ends by recovering her equilibrium after an exquisite and dangerous adventure in which Cherry, the greater egotist, has triumphed over her friend.

"If Marian could have prayed for a gift, she would have demanded joy in her life. Instead, nature had given her as compensation the strength and courage to endure her own pain and the ability to imagine and soften the distress of others. If it is not the first of gifts it is among those most rarely bestowed upon poor mortals, and is without price."

One might say as much of Frank Swinnerton's talent. He appears to be the most complete, the best-*balanced*, the most *amiable*, and the most *even*, of the younger contemporary novelists. "If it is not the first of gifts it is among those most rarely bestowed upon poor mortals, and is without price."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ENGLISH NOVEL SINCE THE WAR

It is impossible to conclude a review of the English novel, in 1920, without pointing out in many young writers a tendency towards a new kind of fiction that breaks with all the traditions of the genre. Some of the most remarkable novels that have been published during the last few years do, indeed, display that minimum of resemblance to ancient or recent masterpieces which assures the continuity of the genre; but their most obvious peculiarities foreshadow one of those periodic changes which make up the history of the English novel.

Clemence Dane, for example, has published two books —*Regiment of Women* and *Legend*—which compel attention by their intensity. The first is perhaps the most vigorous document that has yet been given the public on the mental and moral *possession* of a child and young girl by a woman's soul. This schoolgirl story has, in places, an epic character. Clare Harthill, almost without realizing it, invades the entire being of her young assistant, and she successively leads to exultation and transports, to despair and suicide, the charming and poor little pupil who is abandoned to her terrible ascendancy. The novel really ends with the death of the child, although it is prolonged considerably, and weakly, to show the liberation of the other victim by means of man and love.

*Legend* is a technical masterpiece. The whole action is contained in conversations; it is all ended within a single night. The three unities are as faithfully respected in this novel of literary and contemporary manners as in the classic tragedy most strictly subservient to Boileau's rule:

*Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli*
*Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli.*

The intimates of a young and famous woman novelist (Madala Grey) are gathered at the home of one of her good friends (Anita Searle) who has appointed herself, not without profit, her biographer and her artistic counsellor, her interpreter and her confidante. Each of them evokes Madala after his or her own fashion, and among them all they reconstruct the life of the absent heroine. She has finally married, after an adventure that remains rather vague. All know that she is in travail, and that in a few moments she will either be a mother or dead. A living and vivid portrait of Madala—but deformed, one feels, by jealousy—finally emerges from a discussion in which the painters as well as the model are depicted. Suddenly they learn that Madala has just succumbed. The female Barnum of the dead woman and the chorus of her intimates then commence, under the shock of the catastrophe, the process of intellectual and sentimental modelling which is to furnish posterity with its image of the novelist. Anita Searle prepares her "revelations" concerning Madala Grey. A painter who loved her and a child who did not know her are horrified at the attempt and disgusted at the falsity and anecdote that are already concealing the truth. The night wears on. A sinister London fog invades the house. The dead woman appears in an open door. All her friends are there, but

she is seen by only two of those present: the painter who loved her, and the child who did not know her. In this actionless novel, from which the heroine is absent, the interest does not lag for an instant. It is, in truth, a *tour de force.*

Clemence Dane could never have achieved it had she not possessed in the highest degree the dramatic instinct and the gift of evocation. *Legend* is a play in the form of a novel.

It is by quite different means that Mrs. Virginia Woolf makes her characters live. Here there is no intensity, no drama, but an infinity of minute, precise, shaded strokes, from which finally emerge human effigies that are never to be effaced from the memory. Above all, the young girls are unforgettable. One would say that some of her books, *The Voyage Out,* and especially *Night and Day,* had been created in accordance with the same methods as the pictures of our great impressionists.

The books of Rebecca West (notably *The Return of the Soldier*) and those of Katherine Mansfield (notably a short story: *Prelude*) are other and not less interesting examples of the contemporary flowering in fiction which, while reproducing the form of the traditional novel, has readily sacrificed its moral and social perfume—that was so ardent during the preceding generations—and infinitely shaded and toned down the colours that were so fresh, and sometimes crude, during the years before the war. *The Return of the Soldier,* based upon a Freudian psychoanalytic theory, is one of the best-constructed and most audacious novels of our day.

Others are still more radical. James Joyce, in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* has produced the boldest and most purely impressionistic picture of

adolescence which has ever, perhaps, been dared by a British author.

But of all the writers of the younger generation, Miss Dorothy Richardson seems to be the one who has gone furthest and most consciously towards a complete renovation of the English novel.

Is it a renovation or a slight sickness? One must guard against any hasty decision. The movement with which we are dealing is as yet scarcely launched. None knows the direction of this morning wind; like the Spirit, it blows where it listeth. It is possible that it will have finished blowing before this present page has wholly dried. The innovators, or rather the *innovatresses*, have no doctrine and form no school. The chief among them proclaims and advertises her absolute independence. Yet there is a point at which, almost without knowing it, these young writers meet—these young writers who are busy breaking again the classic mould of the English novel, to make of it no one as yet knows what: fragments or statuettes. And this is the point.

At the beginning of the present study, we said that the English novel has existed only since that period, toward the end of the eighteenth century, when it immediately set down in its program:

Narrative, movement, that is to say a minimum of action, a combination of external events, simple or difficult, but in any case palpable and progressive.

Characters, that is to say an internal analysis of persons, more or less explicit, more or less expressed or expressible, either by the author or by facts, but in any case real and intentional and leading to psychological or moral development.

Emotion, sensibility, pathos, as the old rhetoricians

said; that is, an appeal to the human passions, and, before all, above all, to the strongest, that of love, with the inevitable revelation of its consequences.

Later the novel reached out to touch other fields, other objects, but without abjuring the fundamental trilogy of its origin—action, intelligence, sensibility; without abdicating any one of the elements of its constitution; still less all three at a single blow. In the nineteenth century it aimed at, and succeeded in expressing, the external atmosphere of the human drama. It was considered as an instrument and a means of artistic, social, political, and religious renovation. It had passed beyond the limits of an individual life, to express the collective lives of groups and peoples. All this was only an extension of its object, involving no reduction of its means.

Let us suppose that there comes a day when, in the wake of a tremendous human upheaval for example, the contemporary soul, weary and distraught, more tired than after the Napoleonic or the Thirty Years wars, withdraws into the solitude of its inner castle; then the novel, the image of the soul, will thereafter express, instead of all creation, only the human being and the ephemeral vicissitudes of his intimate life. There will be no more collective intention. No more general paintings. Nothing but individual studies. The domain of the novel will still remain limitless, however, for in art, as in nature and life, the infinitely little is also the infinitely great.

Let us suppose that at about the same time a deepened knowledge of the human being has clarified the dependence of the conscious upon the subconscious, dethroned premeditation, abolished the logic of mind and action

in favour of obscure influences of racial heredity, situated the source of every moral and psychological influence outside man himself, related all emotion, almost all life, to fundamental illusions of the vital and sexual instincts; in short, substituted for the illusion of an independent activity that kind of permanent representation of the external world and of the past which is the faculty of the simplest creatures and organs. In this case fiction, the immediate reflection of any mental attitude, will be able to detach itself suddenly, for an instant perhaps, and perhaps for a long time, from the three forces to which it owes its growth. The novel can cease to be narrative, analysis, and sentiment; it will become instead a simple sequence of impressions, perceptions, and notations, innocent of all preparation, all connexion, and all obvious or perceptible cohesion. It will be, under the same name, something very different; but it will still be, nevertheless, a translation of life.

Just as painting, not without injury to itself, has been able to free itself from drawing and composition; just as music has discarded melody and rhythm—the two arts now expressing only combinations or infinitely shaded varieties of colour and sound—so has the novel reduced itself to doing without heroes and plot, drama and events, passion and analysis, to being no more than the fluid representation of life in a soul, a body, and a heart. The simpler, or the more readily simplified, is the receptive faculty of the observer, the more transparent and elementary will it be, the more precious will be the result.

Women, young girls, even children, can in this way give evidence of an originality more original, a reality more real, than experience and tradition. A work of fiction will no longer be a history of acts, sentiments, impulses,

motives, laughter and tears, but a series of revelatory strokes with no other object than to evoke, contradictorily, by juxtaposition, a character and his environment. It requires perspective, a kind of mental wink of the eyelids, as when one stands before a *pointilliste* painting, to perceive, at its true value and with its true force, the image intended by the painter.

The interest will be shifted, it will diminish almost to the vanishing point for those who do not know how, or do not wish, to see this form of art. For a long time, perhaps for ever, these persons will be in the immense majority. But, nevertheless, a form of the novel art, which if not new is at least revived, will have made its appearance.

If I have made myself understood, you will have some idea of what Miss Dorothy Richardson is now accomplishing in the English novel. I do not pretend that she has created a superior genre, but say merely that she is effecting curious and interesting essays with remarkable courage and simplicity. I do not assert that anyone can take real pleasure in this work without a call to it, without initiation. It is obvious that no analysis can give an account of these elementary books, in which everything is a reflection, a nuance, or a "find"—yes, a veritable accident of the trade—under the appearance of the most extreme professional artlessness.

*Pointed Roofs* was the first stage of Miriam Henderson, a poor, cultivated, sensitive girl who finds herself lodging in a German school in consequence of her having to earn a living. *Backwater* brought her back to London, into one of those ordinary little boarding-schools for young ladies, where she stifles. *Honeycomb* takes her to Newlands, into a rich circle, where the little governess widens

her horizon, tastes luxury, and begins to know, to understand, and to hate men. In these short productions, innumerable touches of light and shade almost strike a balance. *The Tunnel* is a more massive, less easily penetrable work, which describes Miriam's passage through a period of independence and expansion. There is no reason why this biography should not be continued through many volumes. The work of Miss Dorothy Richardson is like life itself, it has neither beginning nor end. Like life, too, it is in perpetual mutation.

There is, really, no reason to believe that Miss Dorothy Richardson has consciously sought originality. In that case she would not have found it. She wrote *Pointed Roofs* and then *Backwater*, her first novels, without any preconceived idea, and, by one of those lucky chances that are the lot of only predestined talents, she struck upon the novel form most closely related to the forms of painting, music and sculpture that are being developed by her generation. It is through other novelists—Beresford, Miss Sinclair and Wells—that she has discovered the relation between her own artistic manner and that of other innovators. Wells considers her the first of the literary "futurists" in Great Britain.

The second part of *Honeycomb*, and the greater part of *The Tunnel*, give evidence that she is growing more and more conscious of her originality. Already some of her methods seem to be hardening; for example, the device of repeating in *staccato* fashion, in detached words and short phrases, what is going on in the background of the mind while the conscious being is outwardly expressing itself in acts and in words. One must arm oneself with patience, and, for certain minds that are especially fond of logic and clarity, it requires as much courage as it

does time to read attentively such books as these. But, when one submits to this trial, one discovers that the pictures of human beings and places evoked by Miss Richardson, the impressions of sentiments and situations which she suggests, are quite as powerful and as lasting, and of a quality more real and more profound than those which many a traditional masterpiece leaves in our memory. She asks more of the reader than any other novelist ever has, and she receives more. This enforced collaboration adds, perhaps, to the impression that her books leave. Who was it who said of love and marriage that they are inns where one finds only what one brings to them? In reading Miss Dorothy Richardson one finds, and one brings, certain ingenuous treasures that one had thought lost since infancy.

## CONCLUSION

The preceding pages would have been written in vain if they failed to leave the impression that the British novel is one of the most alive and one of the most vivacious genres in the literature of the whole world.[1] I have not concealed its chief weakness: a general lack of composition and concentration; over-abundance, over-activity, over-production.[2] But this kind of weakness is not at the command of all. It is the poverty of opulence, the price of liberty. What treasures of observation, what a wealth of subjects, types and methods, what quasi-photographic fidelity there is in the majority of these books, even in those which are not the best! What treasures of life do they conceal and reveal; and how scanty appears the total novel production of other literatures! Even when the contemporary novel is, as in

[1] It is superfluous to apologize for the inevitable lacunæ in this review of the contemporary novel in England. Who can boast of having read even the best of the enormous mass of novels that England has produced during the past thirty years? Yet I must record a certain remorse at not having cited Max Beerbohm, and in particular his *Zuleika Dobson,* which is a treasure of irony; nor *Maurice Guest,* by a woman who signs herself H. H. Richardson, which many excellent judges consider a book in every way remarkable; nor the very fine and very curious studies by Miss Viola Meynell (*Modern Lovers,* 1912; *Columbine,* 1914; *Narcissus,* 1916; *Second Marriage,* 1918); nor John Cournos and *The Mask;* nor many others which deserve mention. But there are too many of them; and one must stop somewhere.

[2] The effort toward artistic concentration is none the less perceptible in many a recent book.

France, of an average quality clearly superior as a work of art, one may maintain that, while it is more exclusively faithful to the single passion of love—and consequently more profoundly human, if it is true that the whole emotional life emanates from the sexual instinct—yet it represents in a less complete and less instructive fashion the totality of modern life.

The war, while it lasted, did not perceptibly change the character of the English novel. It did scarcely more than to furnish it with new subjects, or rather new accessories. The same authors have continued to write in almost the same fashion. Their war novels, save in theme and setting, resemble their peace novels. Even the greatest upheaval of history is impotent to change in the mature man his manner of feeling, seeing, and expressing. Immediate contact with events is not favourable to that constructive effort of the imagination which is essential to every work of art. Just as the Napoleonic epic was not written and described until after it had been lived, so it is probable that the great novels of the war will not be produced until *after* the war, and by another generation which, without knowing it, is in the process of developing these novels from the letters and reminiscences of the combatants.

On the other hand, the present generation is producing many *chronicles* under the form of fiction, to be used as sources by future novelists of the great and terrible period through which we have just lived. Stephen Mackenna's *Sonia*, for example, represents that bewildering succession of fashions, influences, intellectual and moral events, which, since the close of the last century, has precipitated the British world into a whirlpool of ephemeral pleasures; and it symbolizes the terrifying purification of this world

by death and by fire. If, on the other hand, one desires an amusing, witty, and in places singularly revealing picture of England beginning to live again in the year 1919, after having been hurled out of its natural orbit, one will find it in Miss Rose Macaulay's *Potterism*.[1]

This seething movement in English literature at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries, whence has come the latest renovation of the English novel, was in part provoked, for thirty years, by the influence of France. The Russian fashion was inspired at the outset by considerations as commercial as they were artistic. It must be remembered, indeed, that before the war Russia was becoming an enormous market for British fiction; while France was exercising an infinitely more disinterested attraction, and was serving as a model, as a ferment, rather than as a market. At this time, perhaps, France imported into the English novel a certain hedonistic scepticism with which she was then impregnated. From this she has since been delivered, painfully but victoriously. Great Britain, also purified by the ordeal, owed to us a resurrection of the contemporary novel. May it be accomplished, like all other resurrections of her national life after the common victory, in a fruitful community of spirit with rejuvenated France!

[1] A curious phenomenon, in the midst of this debauch of ephemeralities, is the persistence of a purely literary and archaic inspiration which manifests itself in many a contemporary book. The remarkable *Legend* of Clemence Dane (Miss Winifred Ashton) is one example of this. Madala Grey is, perhaps, Charlotte Brontë, whose intimate history is spread out, dissected and exploited by the gossips of posterity. And what else is the *Madeleine* of Miss Hope Mirrlees, who has recently been so well received, but the resurrection and translation, in terms of contemporary psychology, of the state of the soul and mind in which lived the *Précieuses* and the *Jansénistes*, the *Hôtel de Rambouillet* and *Port-Royal*?

I should not like to end this review of the English novel without paying tribute to those of my compatriots who have explored the same field before me.

For thirty years now, the French universities have prided themselves on having powerfully helped, by many a thesis and original work, to make better known and better understood in Europe, and sometimes even in Great Britain and in America, a number of the writers who have adorned the English language. Thus, for example, the theses of M. Angellier on Burns, of Legouis on Wordsworth, of Berger on Blake and Browning (to say nothing of the works of MM. Cestre, Huchon, and many another) are counted among the classics or among the best works of British and American criticism. The contemporary novelists have, for a variety of reasons, been less abundantly studied than the poets and novelists of an anterior epoch by this powerful French school of criticism. The following list of French books on the English novel and on English novelists, which I owe in great part to the kindness of M. Cazamian, shows, however, that the contemporary period has not been neglected in France. The doctoral theses are marked with an asterisk. Some of these books have been written in French by foreigners, for example those of Messrs. Hedgcock, Barton and Killen.

I. Before Defoe:

*Le Roman au temps de Shakespeare*, by M. J. Jusserand.

(See also his *Histoire littéraire du Peuple anglais*, which stops at the renaissance.)

II. On the English novelists of the eighteenth century:

* Joseph Texte: *J.-J. Rousseau et les Origines du Cosmopolitisme littéraire.* 1895.

* L. A. Prévost-Paradol: *Jonathan Swift, sa Vie et ses Œuvres.* 1856.

P. N. Simon: *Swift, Étude psychologique et littéraire.* 1893.

Henriette Cordelet: *Swift.* 1907.

L. Cazamian: *Richardson* (*Cambridge History of English Literature,* vol. x).

P. Stapfer: *Laurence Sterne, sa Personne et ses Ouvrages.* 1870.

* F. B. Barton: *Étude sur l' Influence de Laurence Sterne en France au XVIIIme siècle.* 1911.

J. Le Fèvre-Deumier: *Célébrités anglaises.* 1895. (Study on Mrs. Radcliffe.)

* A. M. Killen: *Le Roman terrifiant ou Roman "Noir" de Walpole à Anne Radcliffe et son Influence sur la Littérature française jusqu'en 1840.* 1915.

* Léonie Villard: *Jane Austen, sa Vie et son Œuvre.* 1914.

Kate and Paul Ragne: *Jane Austen.* 1914.

III. On the English novel of the nineteenth century:

* L. Maigron: *Le Roman historique à l'époque romantique; Essai sur l' Influence de Walter Scott.* 1898.

* L. Cazamian: *Le Roman social en Angleterre* (1830–50) (Dickens, Disraëli, Mrs. Gaskell, Kingsley.) 1903. A capital work, in my opinion, for information on the English nineteenth century, and especially indispensable to anyone who wishes to understand the influence of

the novel on English society, and reciprocally.

L. Cazamian: *Kingsley et Thomas Cooper* (Study on a source of *Alton Locke*). 1903.

A. Joubert: *Charles Dickens, sa Vie, ses Œuvres.* 1872.

R. du Pontavice de Heussey: *Un Maître du Roman contemporain* (Dickens). 1889.

Courcelle: *Disraëli.* 1902.

Vogüé (Eug. de): *Les Romans de Disraëli.* (*Revue des Deux-Mondes*, May 1, 1901.)

Montégut (E.): *Écrivains modernes de l'Angleterre;* 1st series, 1885 (Charlotte Brontë); 2nd series, 1889 (Mrs. Gaskell).

Fl. Delattre: *De Byron à Francis Thompson.* 1913. (Dickens.)

F. Brunetière: *Le Roman naturaliste.* (Study on George Eliot.) 1892.

E. Dimnet: *Les sœurs Brontë.* 1910.

C. Photiadès: *George Meredith.* 1910.

E. Legouis: *L'Égoïste, de George Meredith.* (*Revue germanique*, July-August, 1905.)

* F. A. Hedgcock: *Thomas Hardy, penseur et artiste.* 1911.

C. J. Masseck: *Richard Jefferies: Étude d'une Personnalité.* 1913.

R. Laurent: *Études anglaises.* 1910. (Pater, Wilde, etc.)

André Chevrillon: *Études anglaises et Nouvelles Études anglaises.* 1910. (Kipling, Wells, etc.)

Firmin Roz: *Le Roman anglais contemporain.* 1912. (Meredith, Hardy, Mrs. Ward, Kipling, Wells.)

Fl. Delattre: *La Culture par l'anglais.* (English

novels for the young.)
Léonie Villard: *La Femme anglaise au XIXme siècle et son Évolution d'après le Roman anglais contemporain.* 1919.
Ed. Guyot: *H. G. Wells.* 1920.

IV. On the American novel:
* L. Dhaleine: *Nathaniel Hawthorne, sa Vie et son Œuvre.* 1905.
* E. Lauvrière: *Edgar Poe, sa Vie et son Œuvre.* 1905.

See also Taine's *L'Histoire de la Littérature anglaise,* and that of Augustin Filon, as well as numerous magazine articles, too numerous to mention, which contain the most recent and most living portion of French criticism. Notably, consult the files of the *Mercure de France,* in which, for many years, M. Henry D. Davray has noticed and appreciated with remarkable competence and precision the works of fiction published in Great Britain. For seven years, between 1898 and 1905, I published, in *Le Temps,* many notes on the English novelists; and since then M. René Puaux has frequently noticed, in his *Lectures Étrangères,* new and unknown authors. T. de Wyzewa, M. Philippe Millet, M. Raymond Recouly, in the important periodicals to which they contribute, have devoted their talents to the same work. M. Paul Souday, in the penetrating critical articles which he gives to the *Temps,* has sometimes illumined with a thoroughly French clarity certain aspects of British fiction (cf. article on Samuel Butler, October 21, 1920). M. Pierre Mille, who knows the England of our day so well, and who throws into relief, renders unforgettable,

all that he touches, has often touched "in passing" on the English novel of the present day. *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, whose intelligent curiosity knows no obstacle, has recently undertaken, with M. Valéry Larbaud, to make France appreciate Samuel Butler, an author who is still unknown, or little understood, in this country.

## A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

*This book is composed (on the Linotype), in Scotch. There is a divergence of opinion regarding the exact origin of this face, some authorities holding that it was first cut by Alexander Wilson & Son, of Glasgow, in 1837; others trace it back to a modernized Caslon old style brought out by Mrs. Henry Caslon in 1796 to meet the demand for modern faces brought about by the popularity of the Bodoni types. Whatever its origin, it is certain that the face was widely used in Scotland, where it was called Modern Roman, and since its introduction into America it has been known as Scotch. The essential characteristics of the Scotch face are its sturdy capitals, its full rounded lower case, the graceful fillet of its serifs and the general effect of crispness.*

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED AND PRINTED BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y. · ESPARTO PAPER MANUFACTURED IN SCOTLAND AND FURNISHED BY W. F. ETHERINGTON & CO., NEW YORK · BOOKS BOUND BY H. WOLFF ESTATE, NEW YORK.

*P4-ACQ-434*